# my Golden Library of
# Animal Stories

FROM AUSTRALIA AND
NEW ZEALAND

## Volume 4

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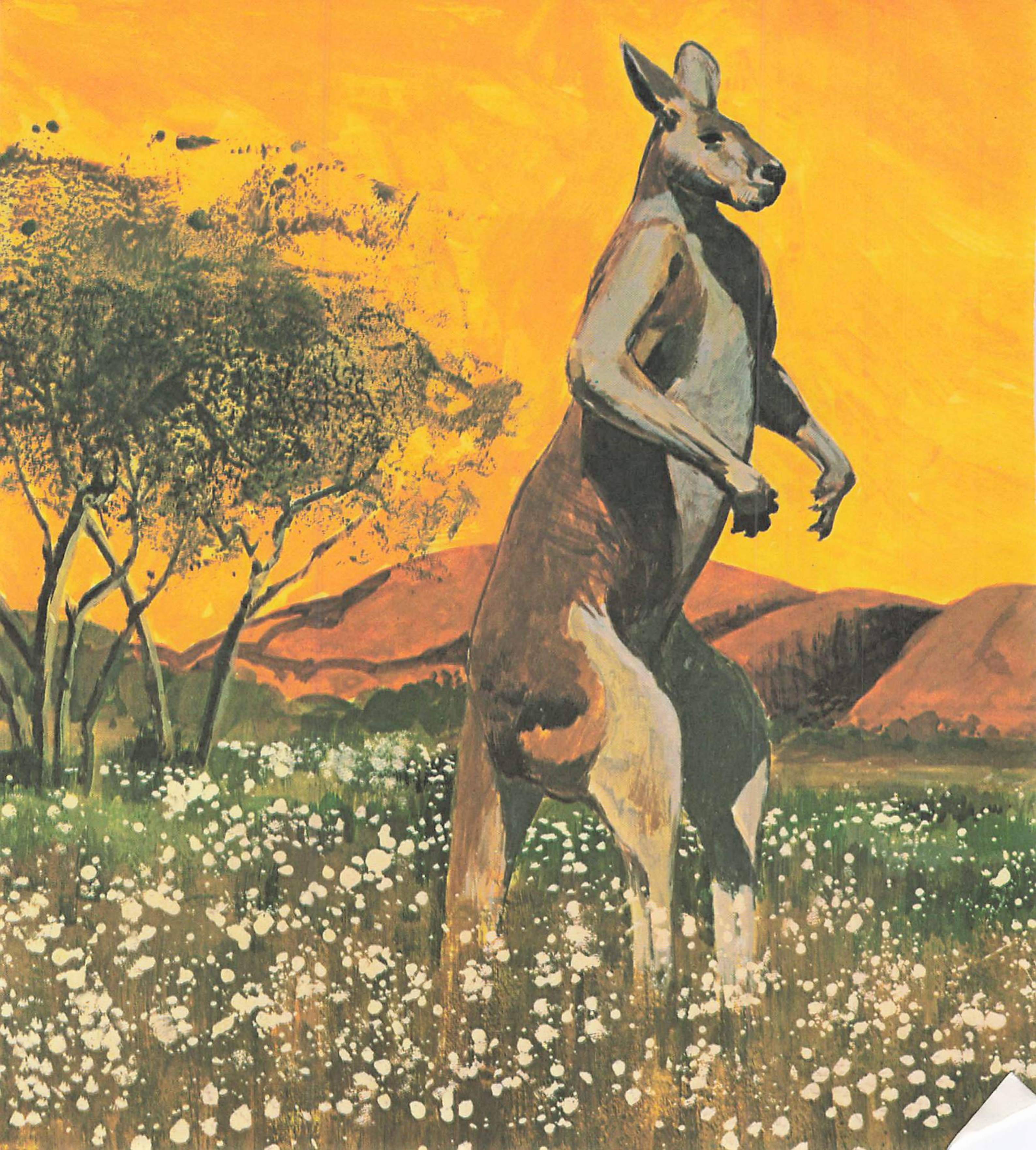
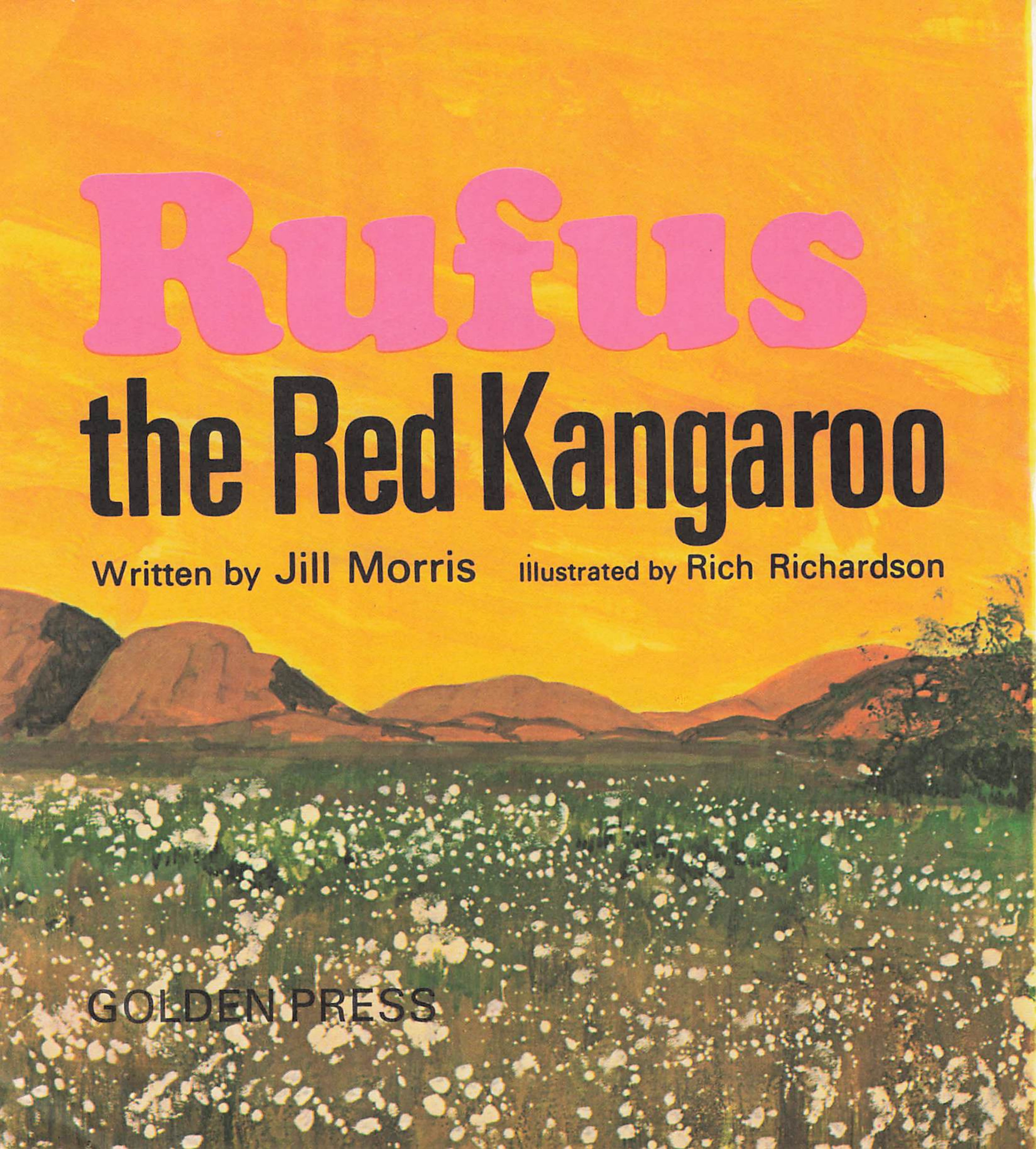
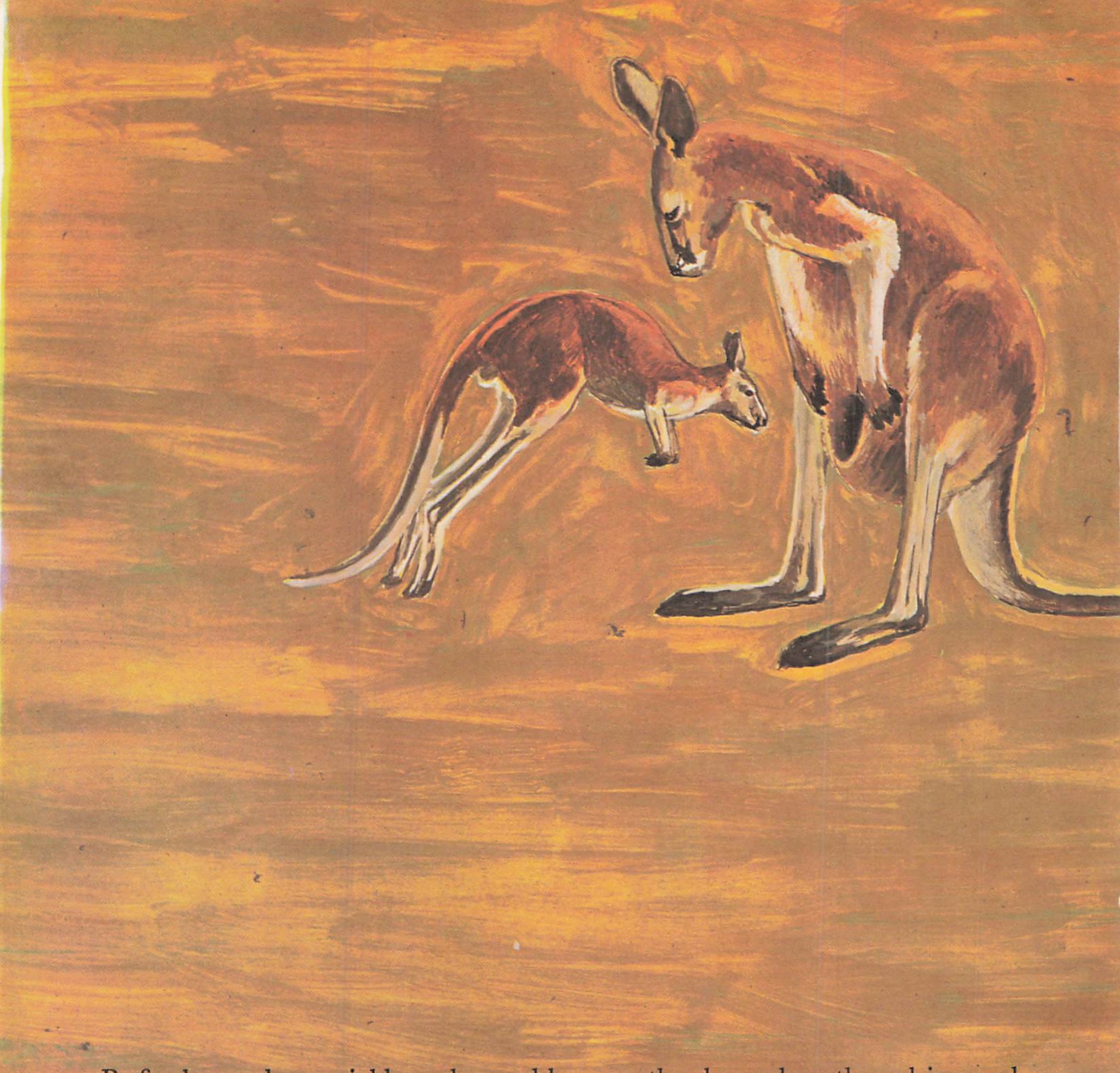




# Rufus
# the Red Kangaroo

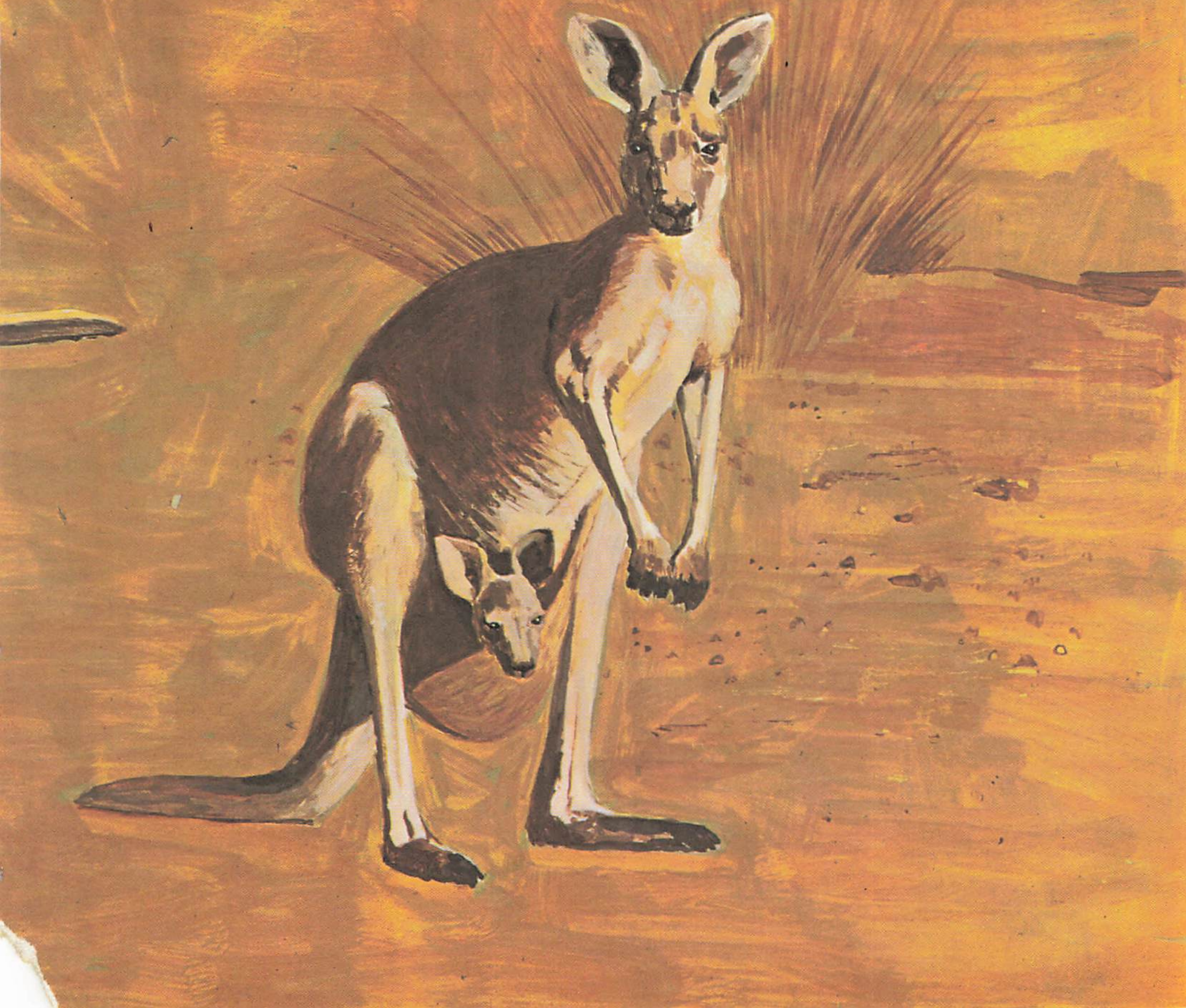
Written by Jill Morris Illustrated by Rich Richardson

GOLDEN PRESS



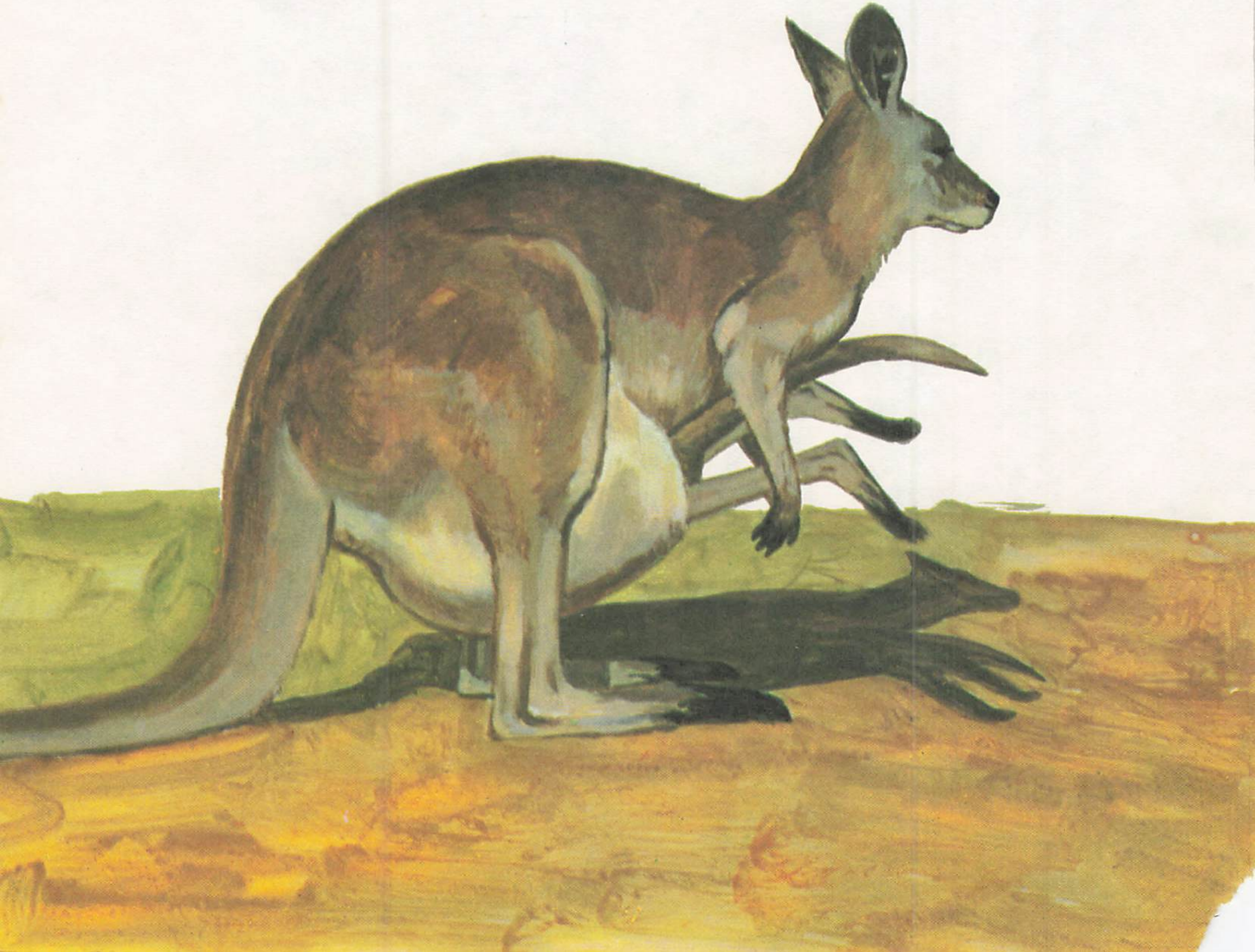
Rufus hopped as quickly as he could across the dry red earth and jumped head-first into his mother's pouch before she knew what he was doing.

His mother tried to push him out, quite gently, because he was too big to fit into the pouch any longer. He was almost eight months old and it was time he hopped on his own four legs. Yet Rufus was like all young joey kangaroos. He wanted to stay in the pouch just as long as he could. As long as someone was willing to carry him, he would prefer to ride.



However there was a surprise in store for Rufus. Until today, whenever he jumped into the pouch, his head would go in first, while his long thin legs poked out behind him. Next his body would wriggle round inside and make room in the pouch for his legs. Then his head would pop out and look round at the world, and off he would go riding, wherever his mother carried him.

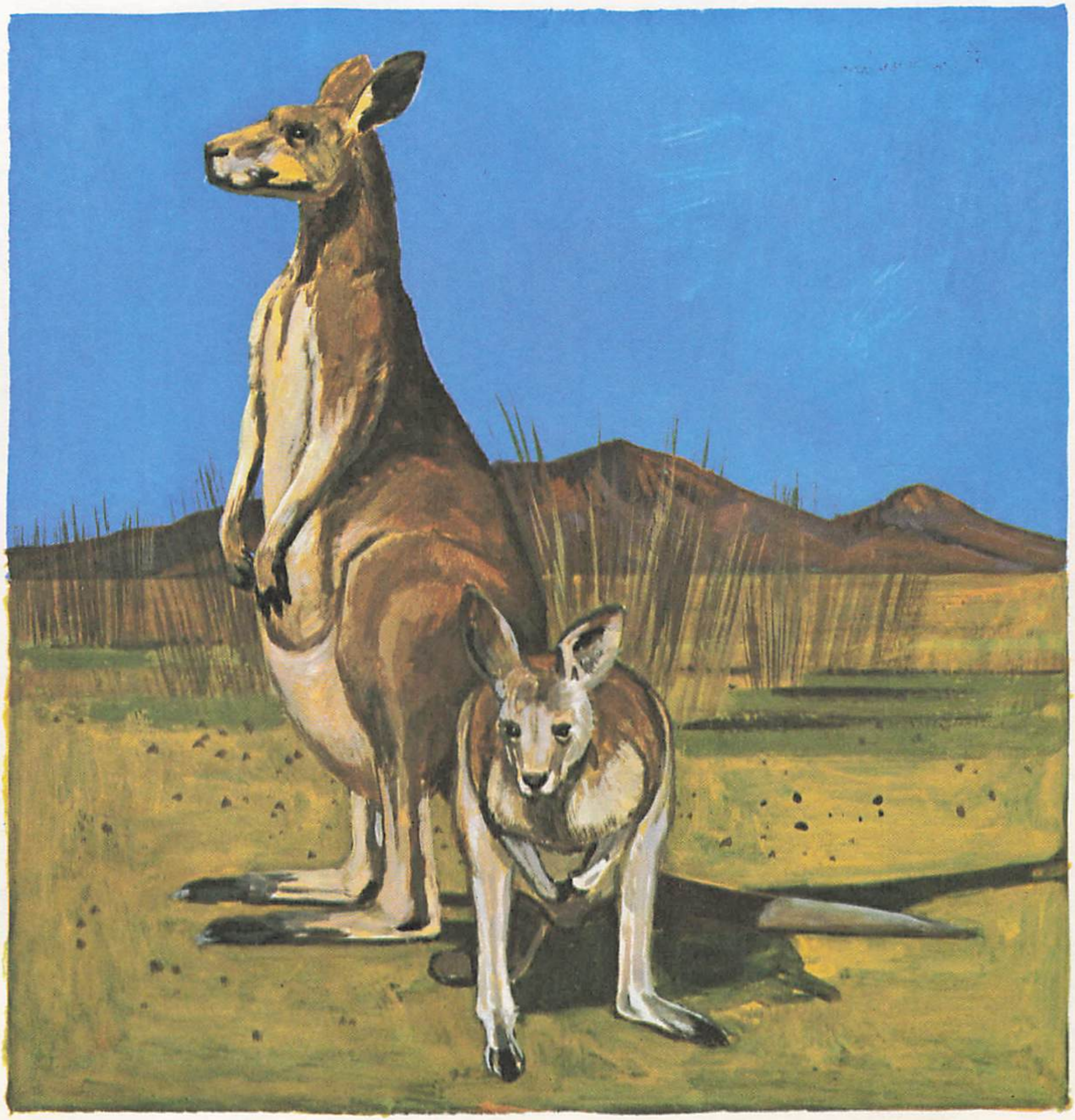
Today it was different. Today the legs just wouldn't fit. Rufus's head was in the pouch, but inside there was no room to move, no space in which



to turn around. Outside, the legs were kicking in the air, but they were no help at all.

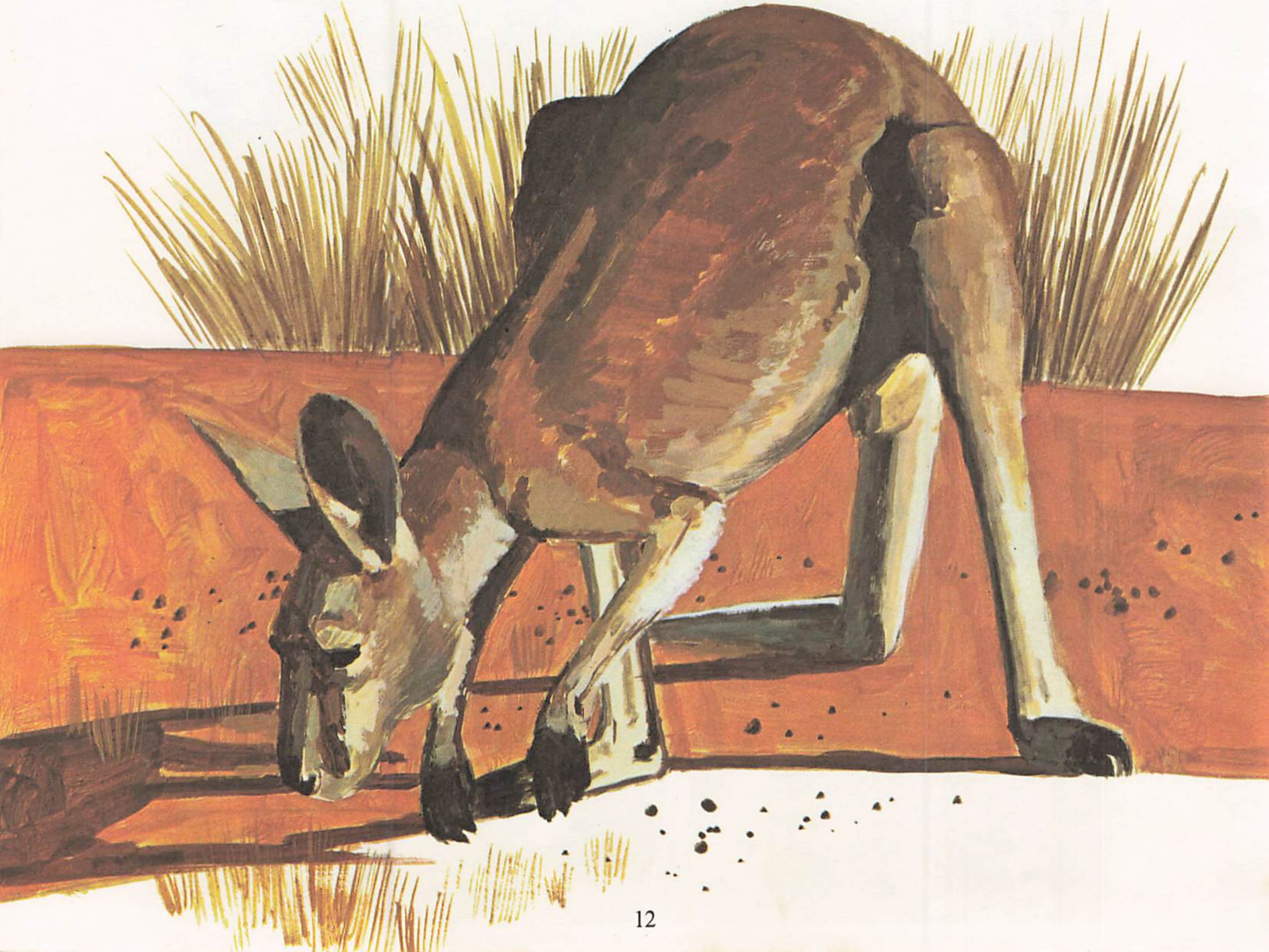
The mother kangaroo was pushing with her paws, telling Rufus to climb outside again. He was just too big!

Rufus twisted and squirmed, then he wriggled with his body and kicked with his legs, but it was no use. His mother was right. He couldn't fit in the pouch any longer. From now on, he would have to hop alone.

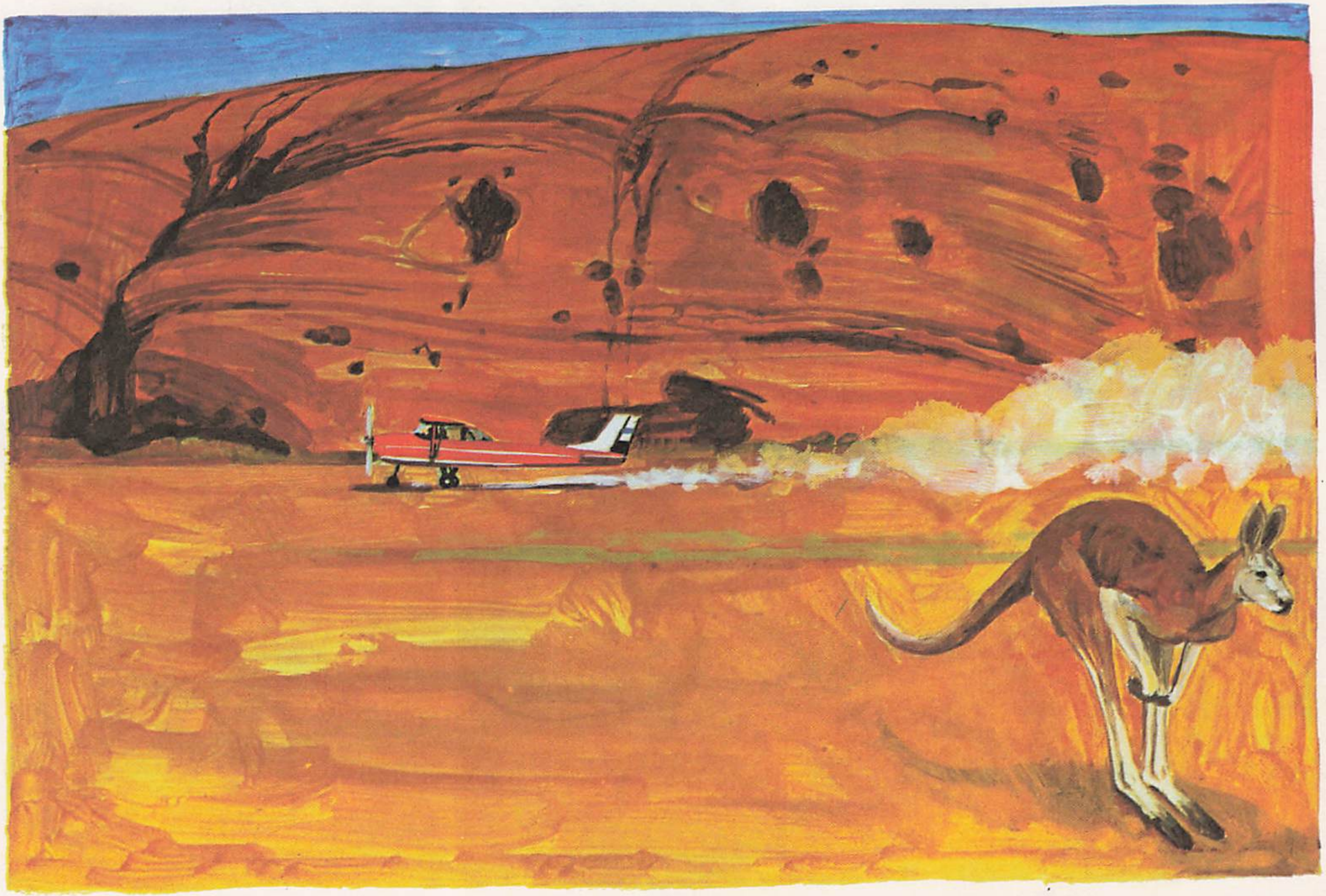


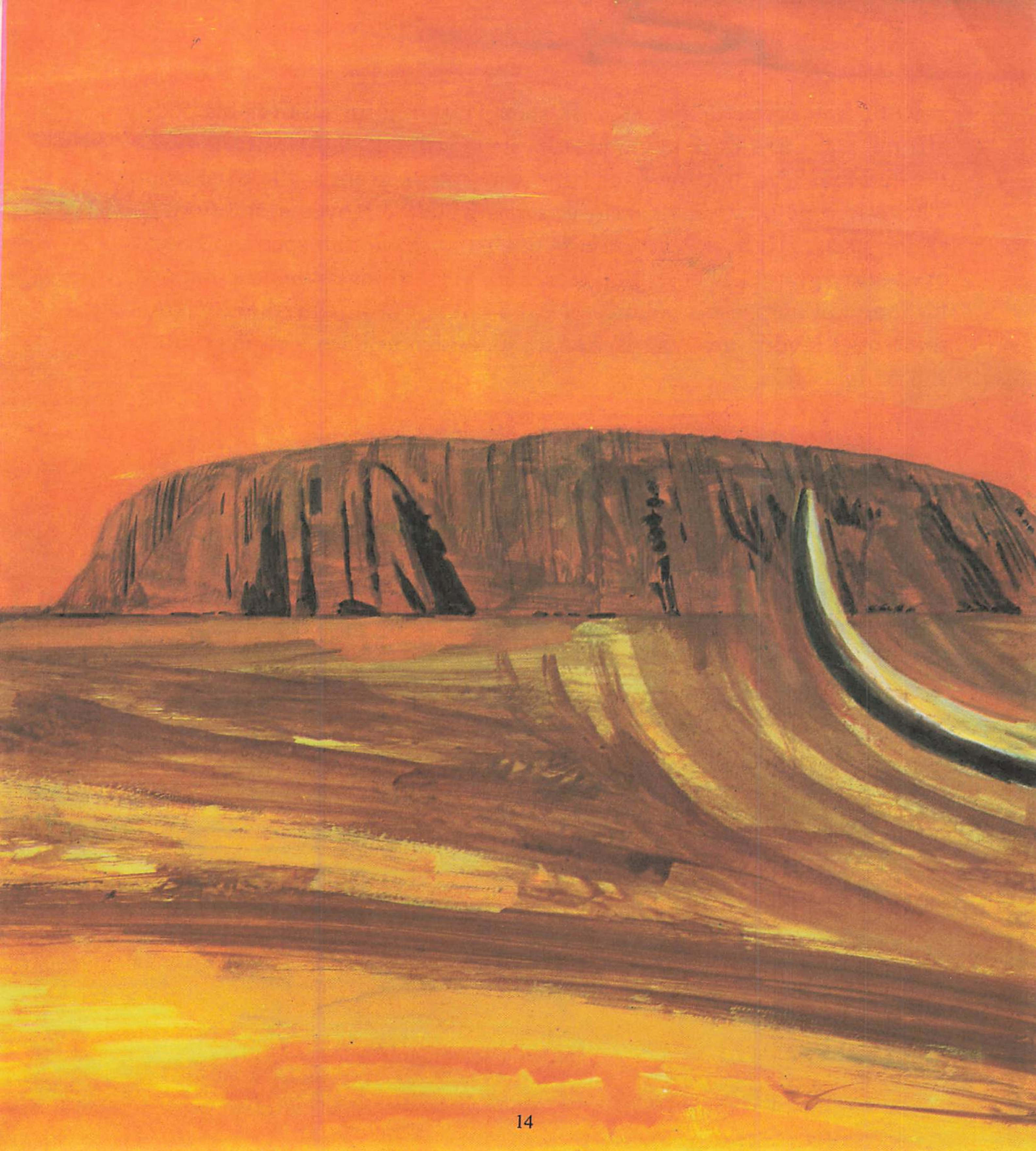
So out he came, wriggling backwards, until he stood alone on the dry red ground, under the Australian sun. His mother nodded at him, then she turned her head away to stare across the open plain. She was too busy with other matters today to worry very much about Rufus.

The day was hot. The midday sun was beating down on the plain. The ground where Rufus stood was baked in hard dry crusts and cracked in long grass lines after months without rain. On the ground there was no grass. For kangaroos there was no feed.



Rufus was a red kangaroo, with short rusty-red fur all over his body. His tail was grey, dark along most of its length and lighter at the tip. He had four legs, but the back ones were much stronger than the front. The only time he used his front legs was when he moved along slowly, eating grass. His back legs were the ones that gave him speed to bound over dusty ground. Those hind legs were very strong. When he hopped, his long tail helped his balance like the tail of the small red aeroplane that sometimes landed near the Rock and made Rufus dash for safety into the mulga scrub.

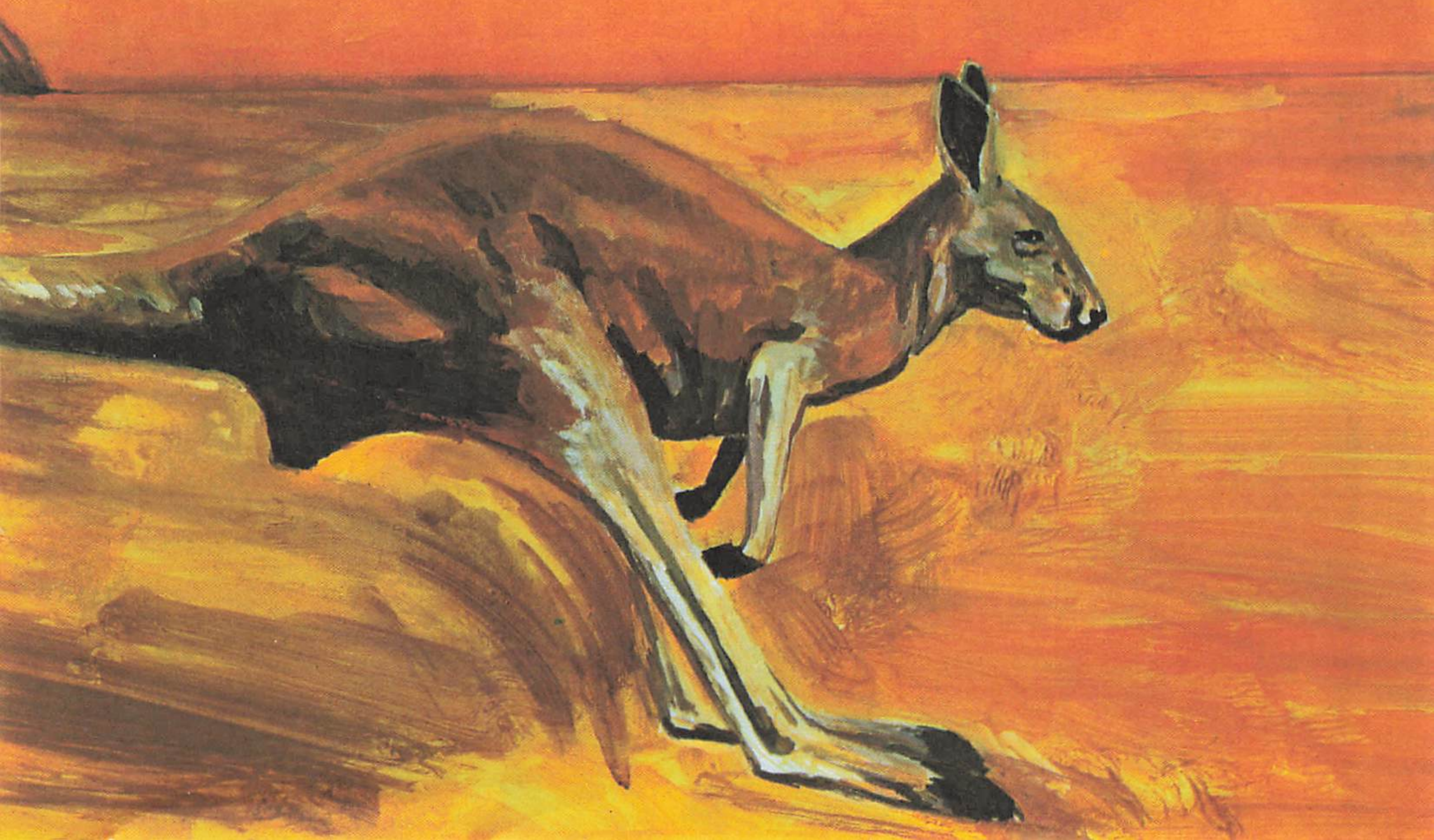




When Rufus hopped, his body moved in rhythm—BOOM—BOOM—BOOM!—and all of his body pointed forward, leaning the way that he was going. He took long leaps, like all red kangaroos, but his soft padded paws made hardly a mark where they landed on the dusty ground.

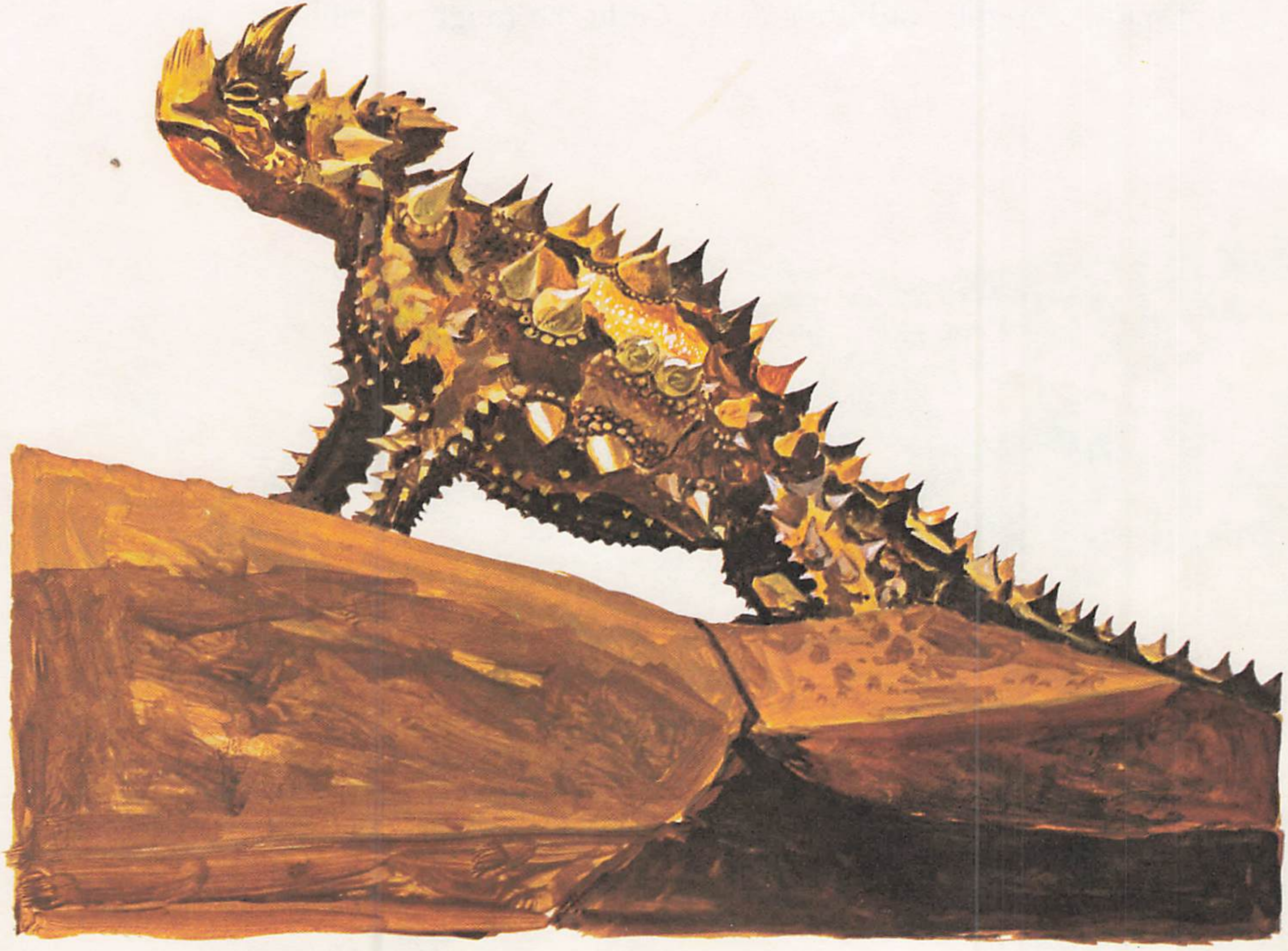
Rufus could hop very quickly now, but not as quickly as his father, who always led the pack of kangaroos. His father was a Big Red kangaroo, fleet of foot and powerful, with very strong hind legs. One day soon, Rufus would be a Big Red, too.

It was so hot and dry where Rufus lived, in the centre of Australia, that not many animals could live there. Only the toughest could survive.



Out on the plains where Rufus lived, were snakes and lizards of many kinds, which were hard to see; they lived under rocks, and most of them had skin the same colour as the ground.

But Rufus had seen Thorny—and he would never forget! One day, when Rufus was very young, he'd been hopping gaily across dry ground, when he saw a little head poking out from underneath a rock. He stopped hopping and stood very still. He poked his nose towards the rock to see if the head was something he could eat.

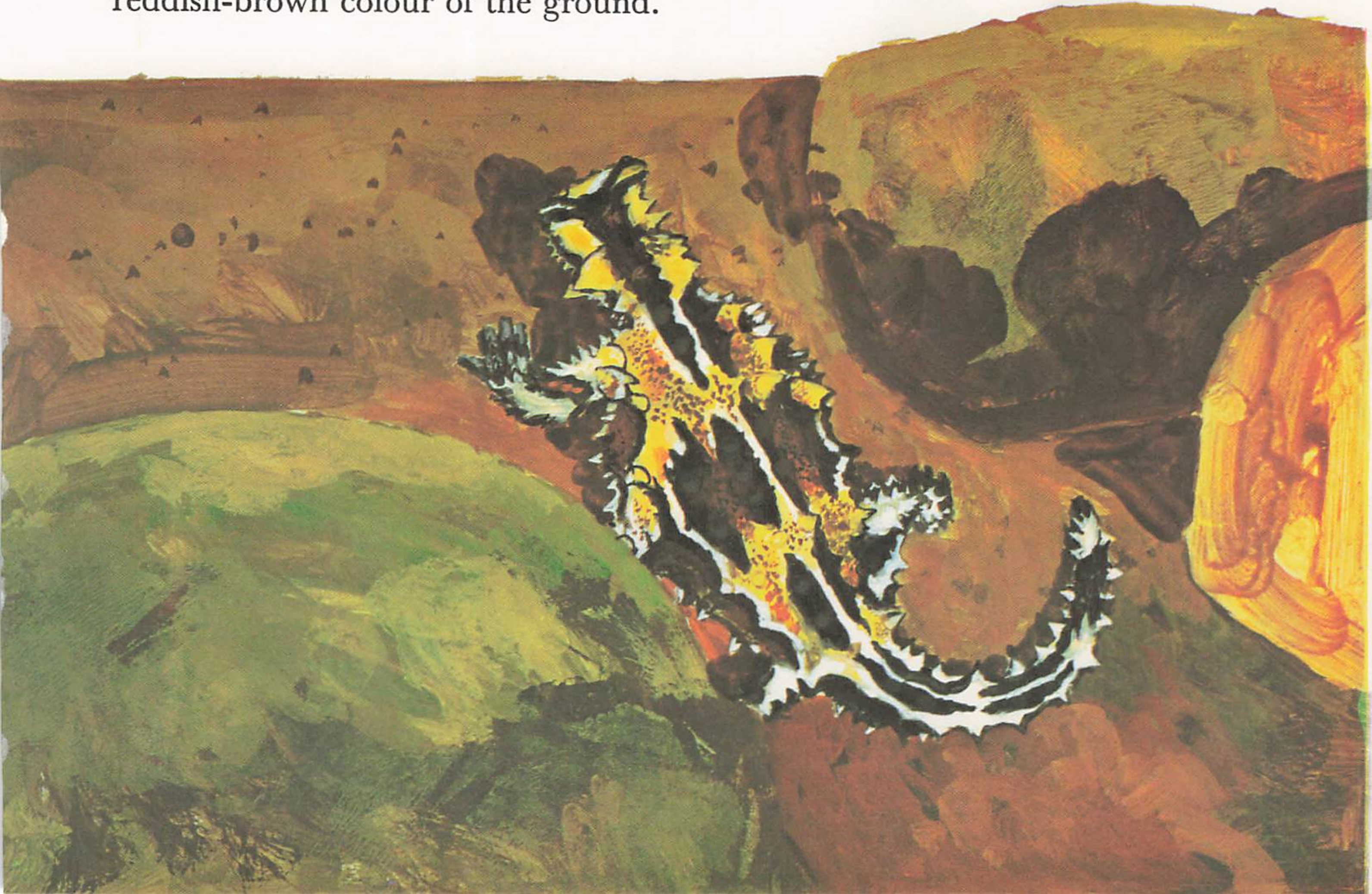


Very slowly, as Rufus watched, Thorny came out from under the rock. Thorny was a spiky lizard known as a mountain devil. Although he was very small, he looked quite fearsome.

All along his back the skin rose up in lumps, each bearing a prickly spike. Over his eyes were two fierce horns. He looked like a dragon going into battle or an armoured tank moving off to a war.

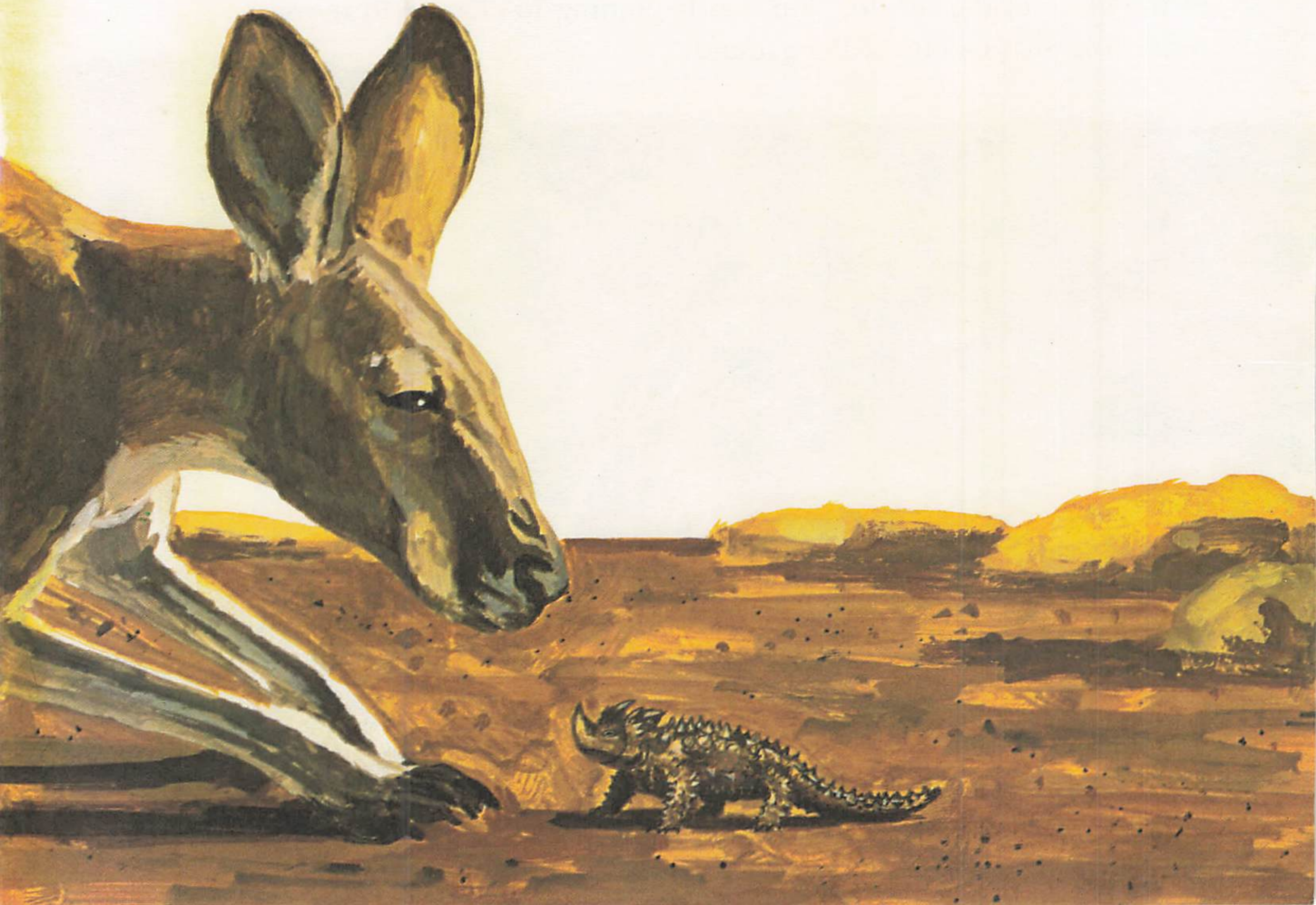
Rufus was curious about the strange little creature, but he was afraid to poke his soft little nose too close to it. Those spines looked sharp.

When Thorny had first come out from under the rock he had looked rather like a rock himself with his hard, old, dark-grey skin. But now, in the glare of the sun his skin was beginning to change to the same reddish-brown colour of the ground.



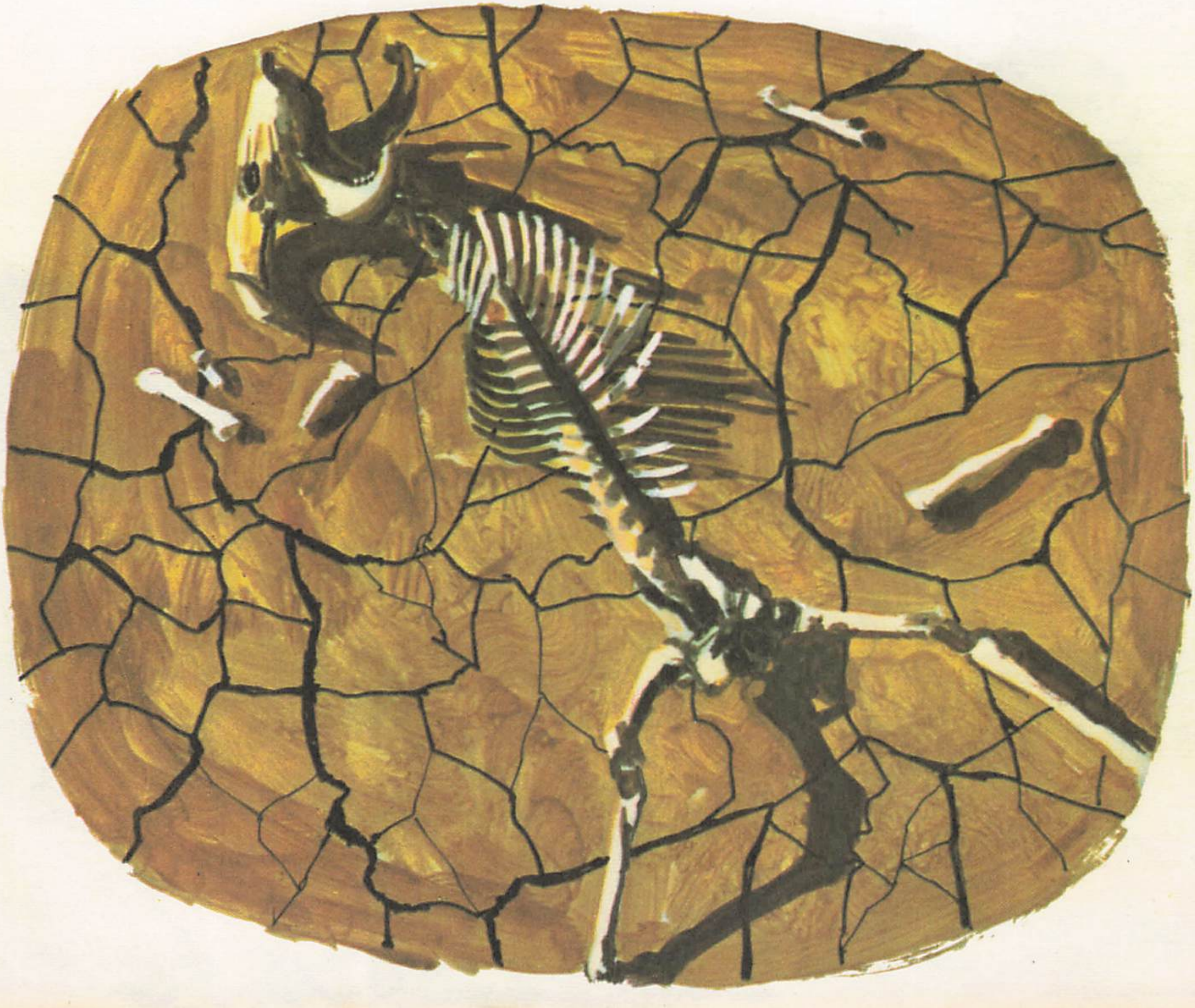
Rufus stood at a distance and watched the lizard move away. He was very, very slow, and had no need to run. With his thorny back, he was safe from harm. There was not a spot on that back where an enemy could bite without taking a mouthful of prickly thorns.

Little Rufus liked his life out here on the open plains. He moved with the other kangaroos to wherever they could find some food. During the day, when the sun was so hot, the kangaroos would rest in the shade of the mulga trees, or under the tall white ghostly gums. At night when the air was cool, they would move off hopping to wherever they could find some grass.

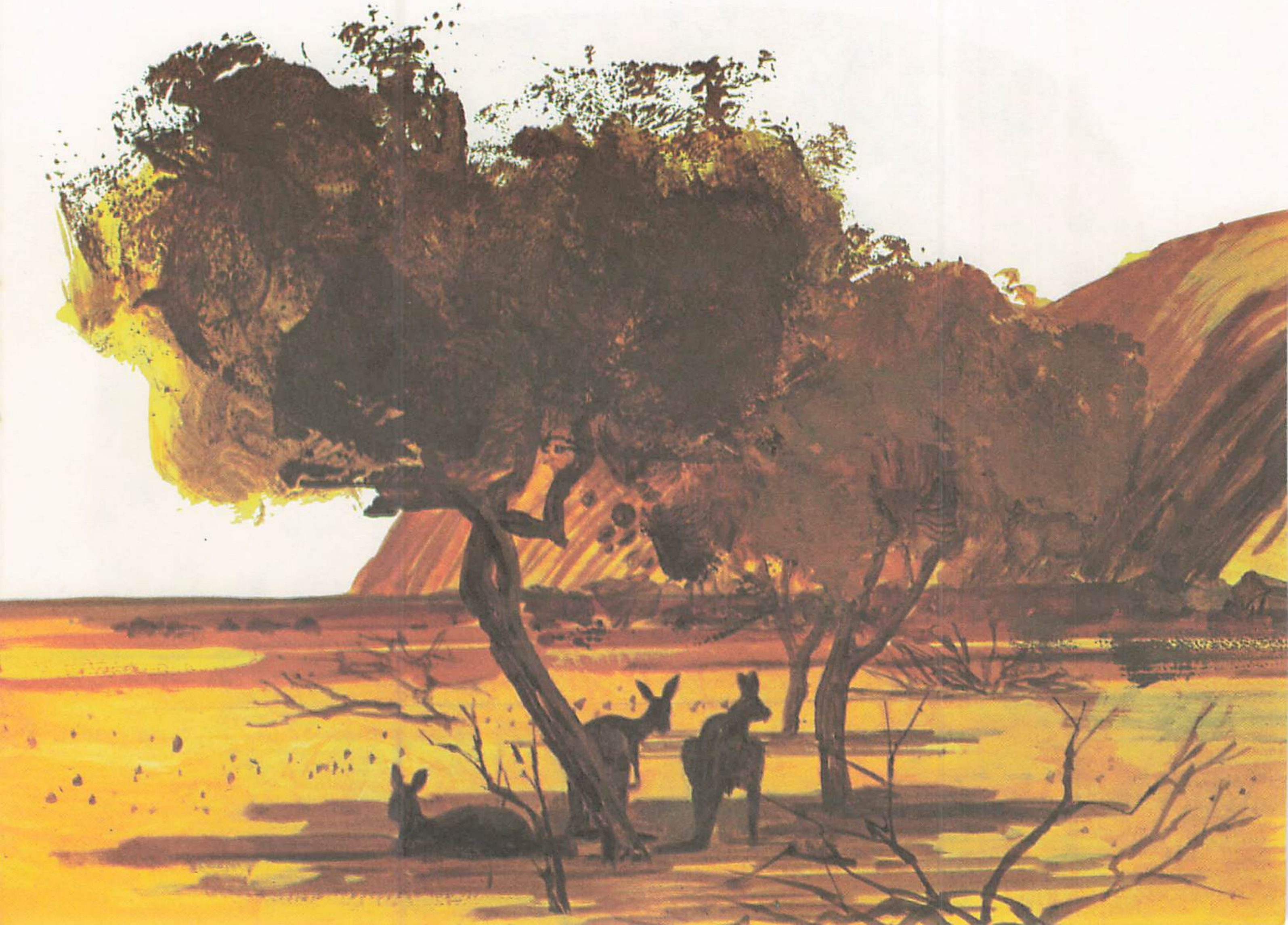


Grass was becoming harder to find, and most of the clumps were nibbled to the roots. Out here, inland, there was a drought.

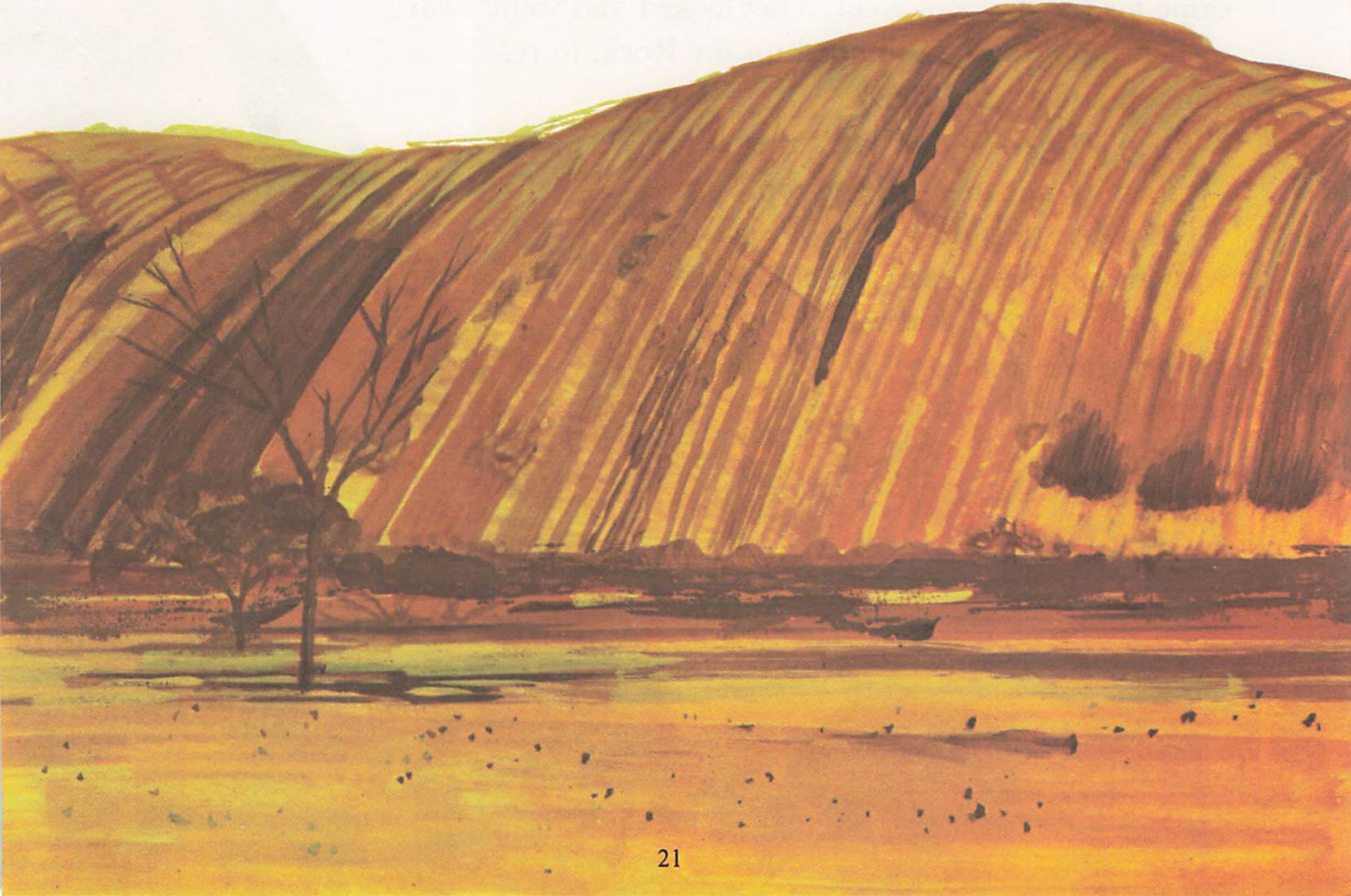
It hadn't rained for months. Where rivers should have been there were only lines of cracked holes in the ground. There were beds of salt where there should have been lakes. This was the driest part of Australia, right in the centre of the land, where the bones of dead cattle lay baking, ever whiter, in the sun. The kangaroos sniffed at the bones, and sensed that THEY too would die unless they could find food.



Rufus rested with the others in the shade of the mulga trees and waited for the sun to disappear. Last night they had moved a long way from here, and found some grass on a piece of damp earth, kept alive by a secret spring hidden deep down underground, but now that grass was gone, nibbled down to its very roots. Tonight they would go farther, and look for more grass somewhere else. Tonight they would be going far away from the Rock.



Wherever Rufus went, the Rock was always near. He always saw it standing there, because it was so big. It was so high, it stood like a mountain, all alone out there on the plain. It stood up high, yet it seemed to lie down, like a crouching dog, like a dingo ready to spring, like a native cat after its prey, like a red kangaroo resting in the heat of the day.



At one end of the Rock, a tail hung down; a long thin tail of solid rock. People even called it "The Kangaroo's Tail". Rufus's fur was red, and so was the Rock, but Rufus could hop wherever he wished. The Rock had stood still for a million years.

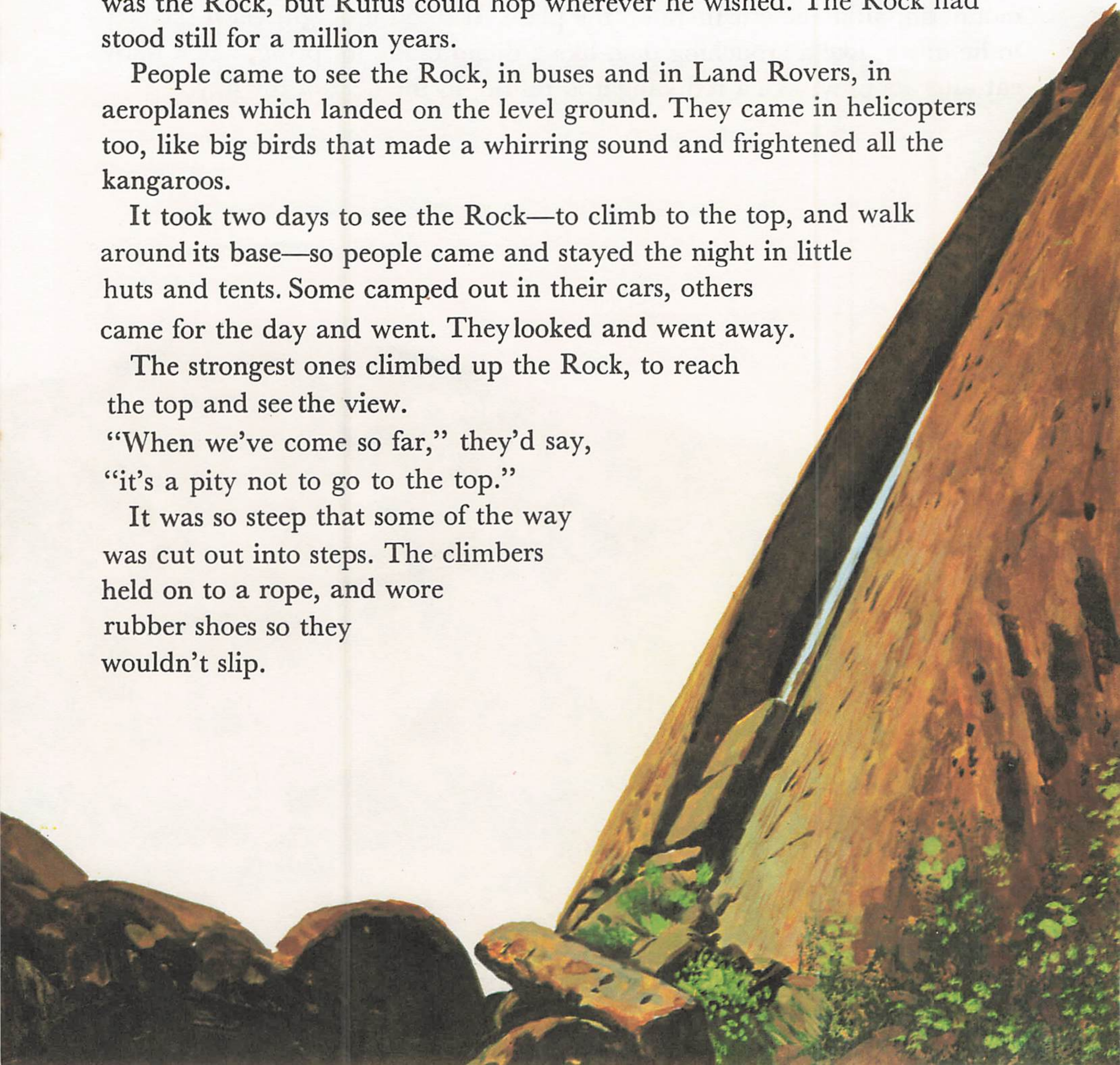
People came to see the Rock, in buses and in Land Rovers, in aeroplanes which landed on the level ground. They came in helicopters too, like big birds that made a whirring sound and frightened all the kangaroos.

It took two days to see the Rock—to climb to the top, and walk around its base—so people came and stayed the night in little huts and tents. Some camped out in their cars, others came for the day and went. They looked and went away.

The strongest ones climbed up the Rock, to reach the top and see the view.

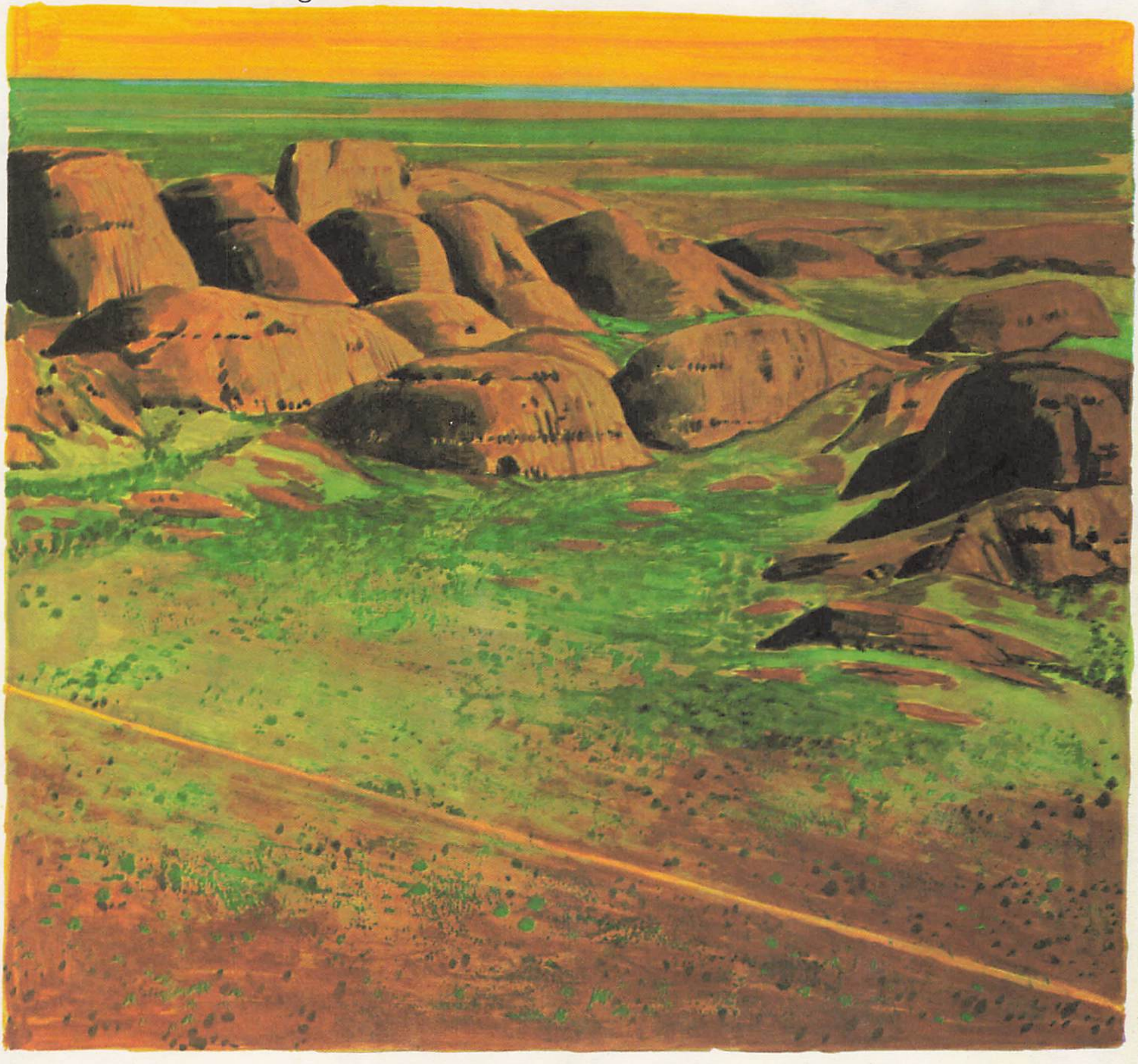
"When we've come so far," they'd say, "it's a pity not to go to the top."

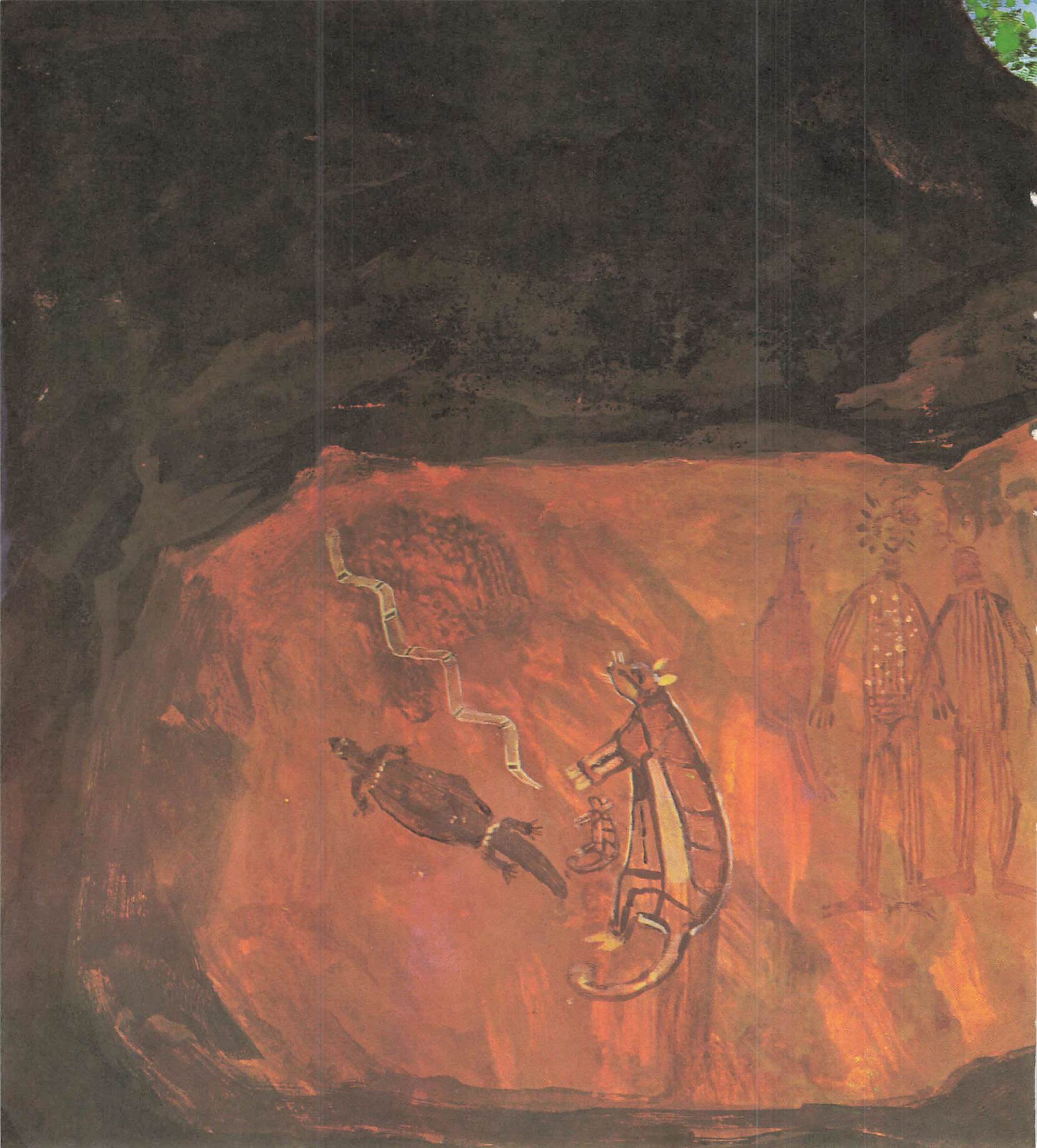
It was so steep that some of the way was cut out into steps. The climbers held on to a rope, and wore rubber shoes so they wouldn't slip.

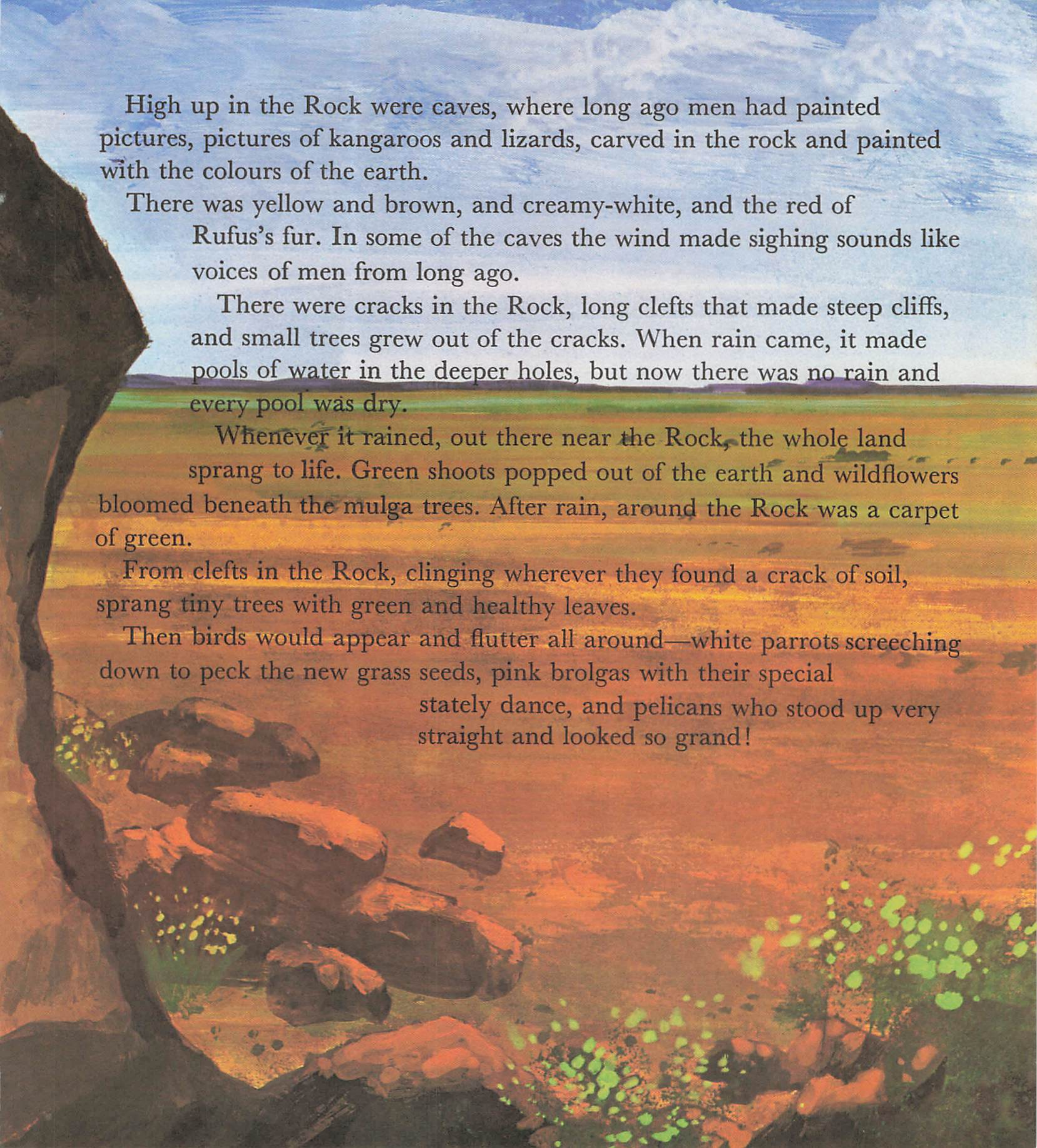


They were out of breath when they reached the top as the climb was higher than it looked. From the top you could see for miles around.

Far away across the plains were some mountains, very high, and smooth and round like big round heads of rock.







High up in the Rock were caves, where long ago men had painted pictures, pictures of kangaroos and lizards, carved in the rock and painted with the colours of the earth.

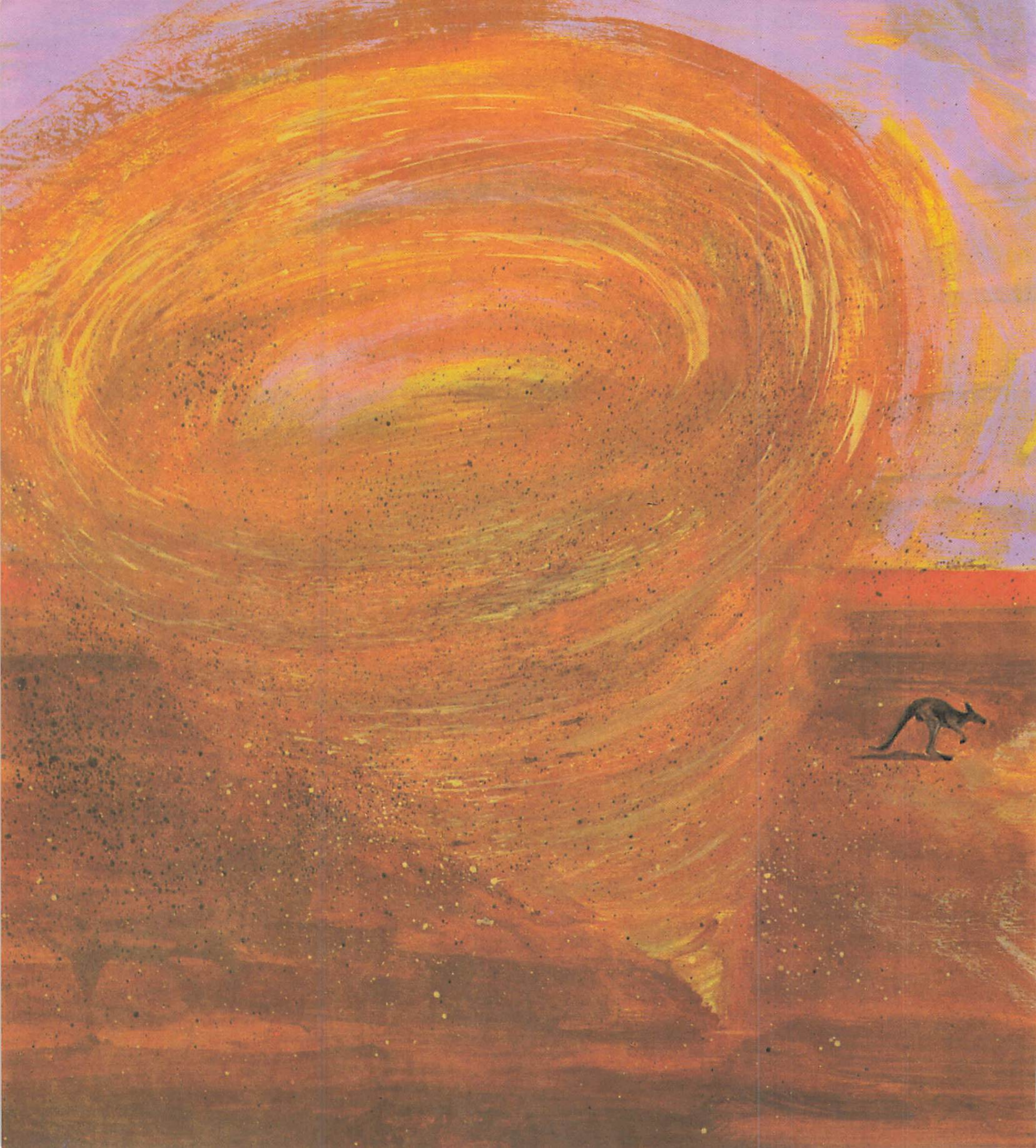
There was yellow and brown, and creamy-white, and the red of Rufus's fur. In some of the caves the wind made sighing sounds like voices of men from long ago.

There were cracks in the Rock, long clefts that made steep cliffs, and small trees grew out of the cracks. When rain came, it made pools of water in the deeper holes, but now there was no rain and every pool was dry.

Whenever it rained, out there near the Rock, the whole land sprang to life. Green shoots popped out of the earth and wildflowers bloomed beneath the mulga trees. After rain, around the Rock was a carpet of green.

From clefts in the Rock, clinging wherever they found a crack of soil, sprang tiny trees with green and healthy leaves.

Then birds would appear and flutter all around—white parrots screeching down to peck the new grass seeds, pink brolgas with their special stately dance, and pelicans who stood up very straight and looked so grand!



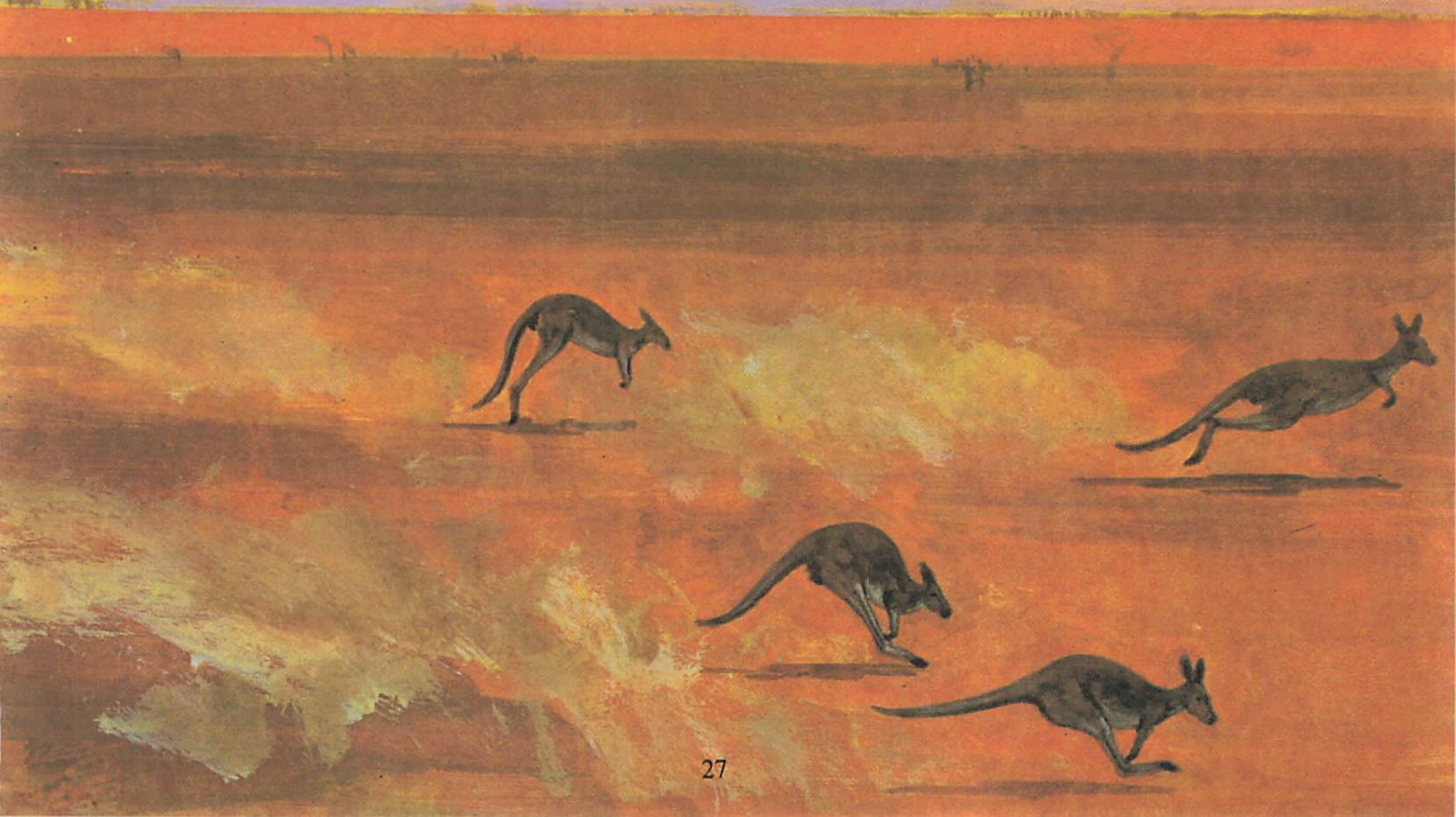
When it rained out here, the wild geese called, honking as they flew: HONK—HONK! "The water's come! The land is green!"

That's what would happen, if it rained. Rufus could hardly remember what rain was like. It was so long ago, and he had been so young. Now there was no rain at all.

At times like this, when the land was dry, the wind would blow the soil up in a cloud which whirled round in the air. The dark men called it "willy-willy". When all the loose soil was dry and red, the willy-willy looked red, too.

The day was very dry. The smell of dust was in the air. It lay like a blanket on Rufus's coat as he waited with the other kangaroos until the sun had almost disappeared, then they all moved off to look for food.

This time, Rufus had to hop alone. He knew he could not keep up with the Big Reds, but he would try, so he set off at a gallop.

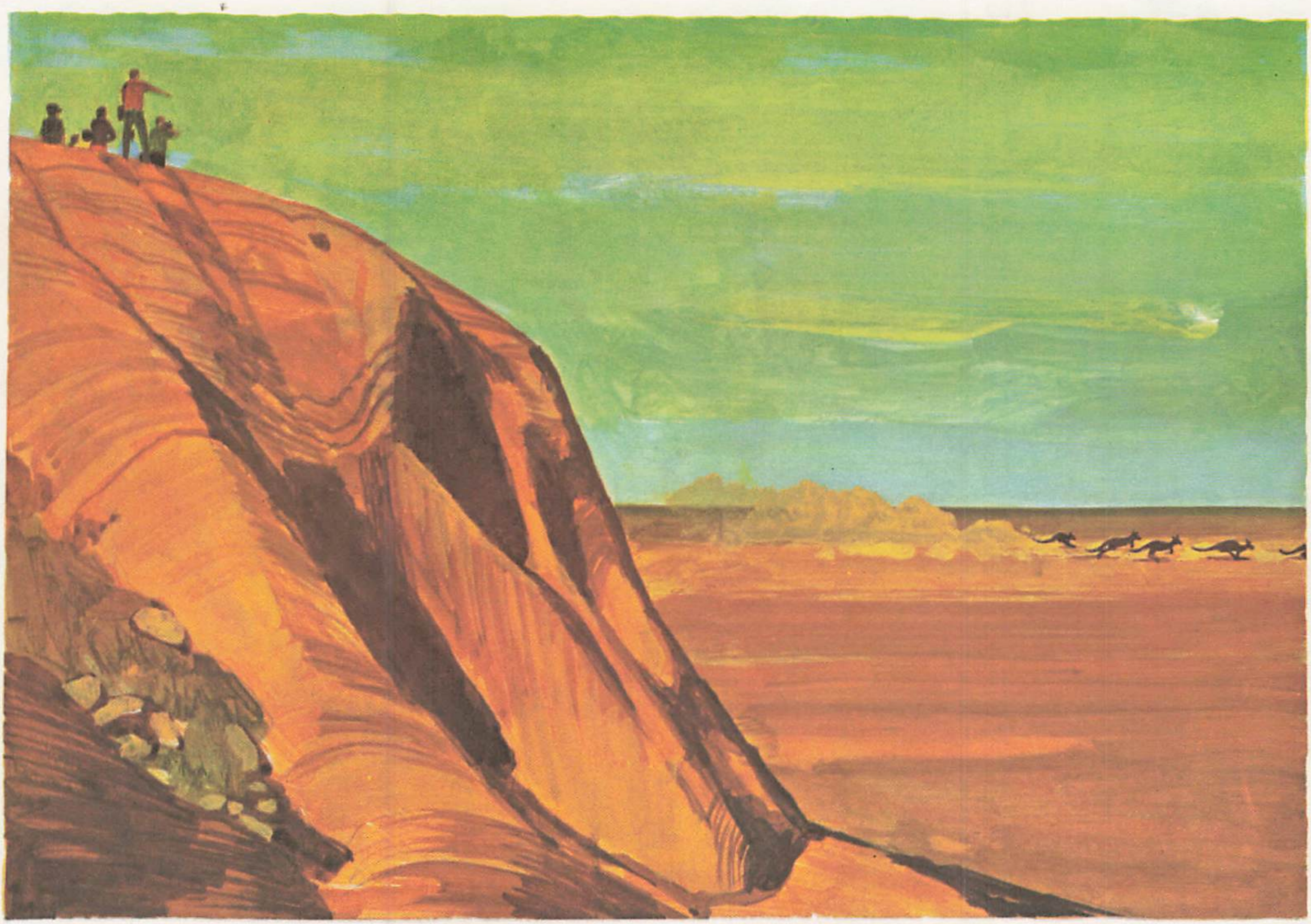


The leaders moved off first. They would decide which way the pack would go. From far away they had picked up the scent of water on the air. They would follow the scent to find water and food.

The smaller joeys travelled in the pouch. They would have an easy ride! Rufus was doing very well as he was keeping up, although he was so small. The powdery dust which covered the ground rose in a cloud as the kangaroos moved off.

The people standing on the Rock saw the cloud of dust.

"Look!" said the children. "Kangaroos, all in a bunch. Look at them hop!"

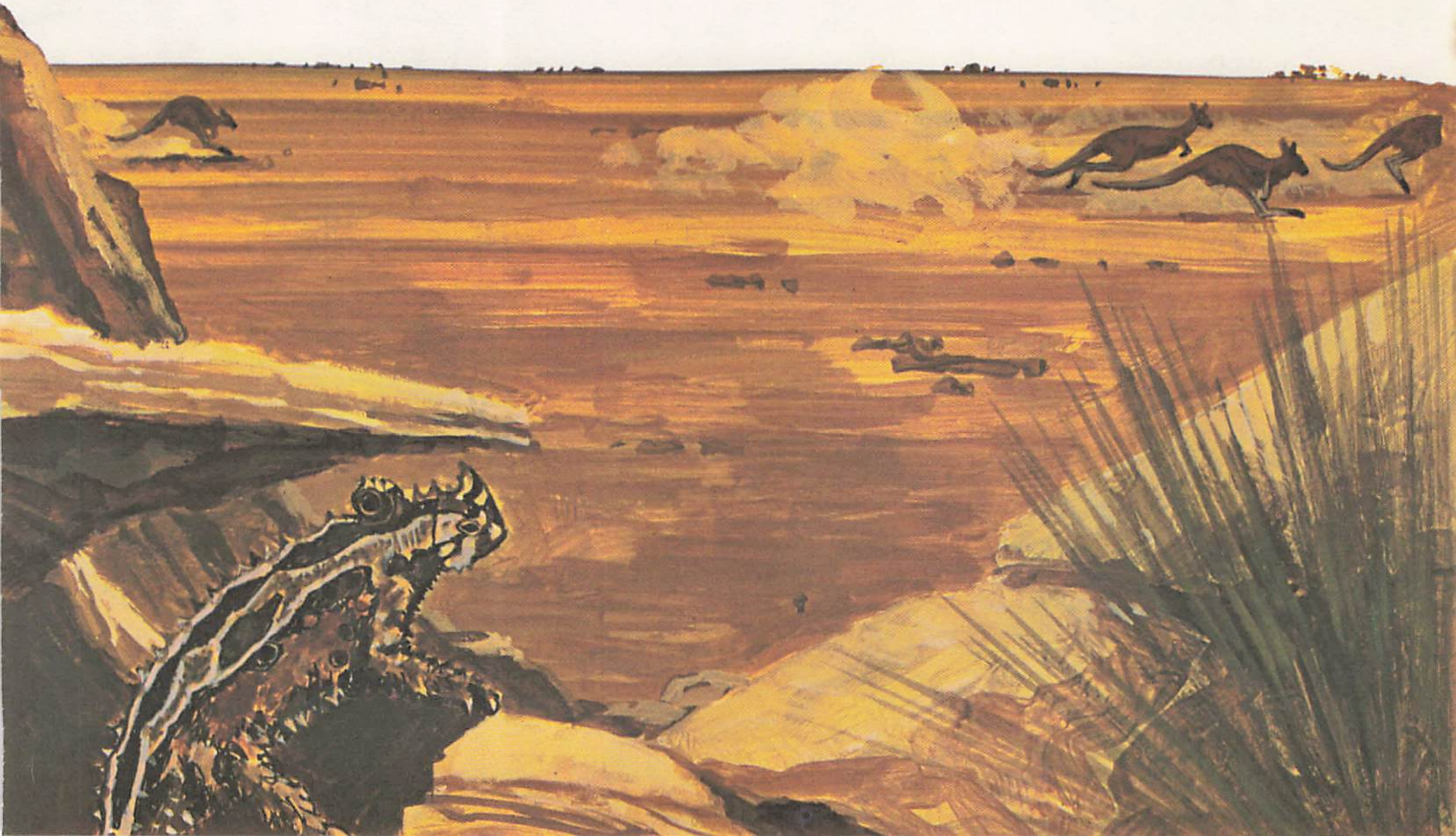


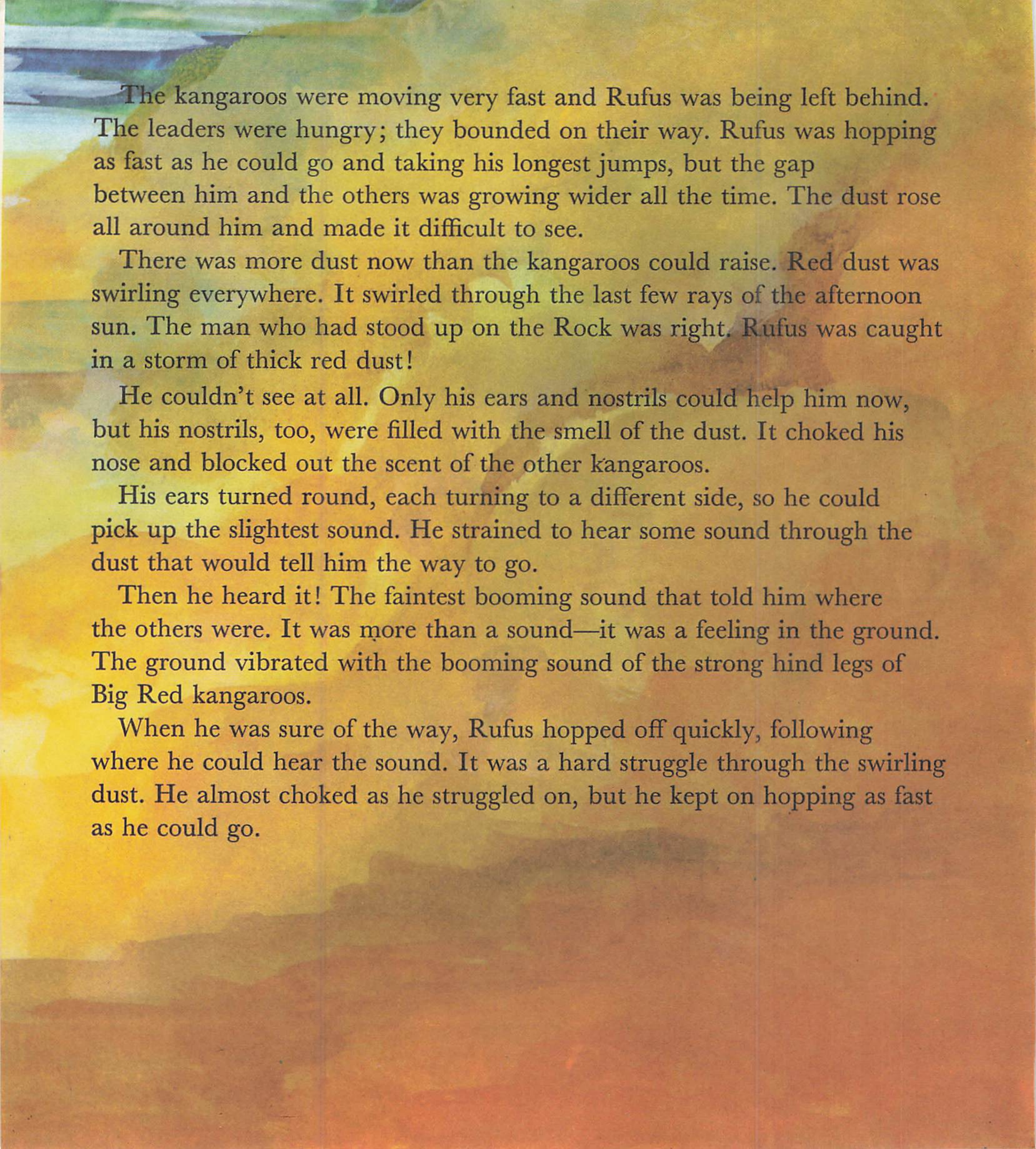
"Yes," said their father. "They wait until night is near to move out and find their food. There's not much here. Let's hope they find some grass."

"Looks like a dust-storm", said a man. "See the red cloud of dust way over there? Better go down before it comes."

The children had food in their car. The men had food in their huts. They would all be able to eat that night. The kangaroos might not.

From the shelter of his little rock, Thorny the lizard saw them go. He lived on insects gathered with his sticky tongue. He had a better chance of finding food than Rufus had, and he could go without water for a very long time. He could store water under his skin.





The kangaroos were moving very fast and Rufus was being left behind. The leaders were hungry; they bounded on their way. Rufus was hopping as fast as he could go and taking his longest jumps, but the gap between him and the others was growing wider all the time. The dust rose all around him and made it difficult to see.

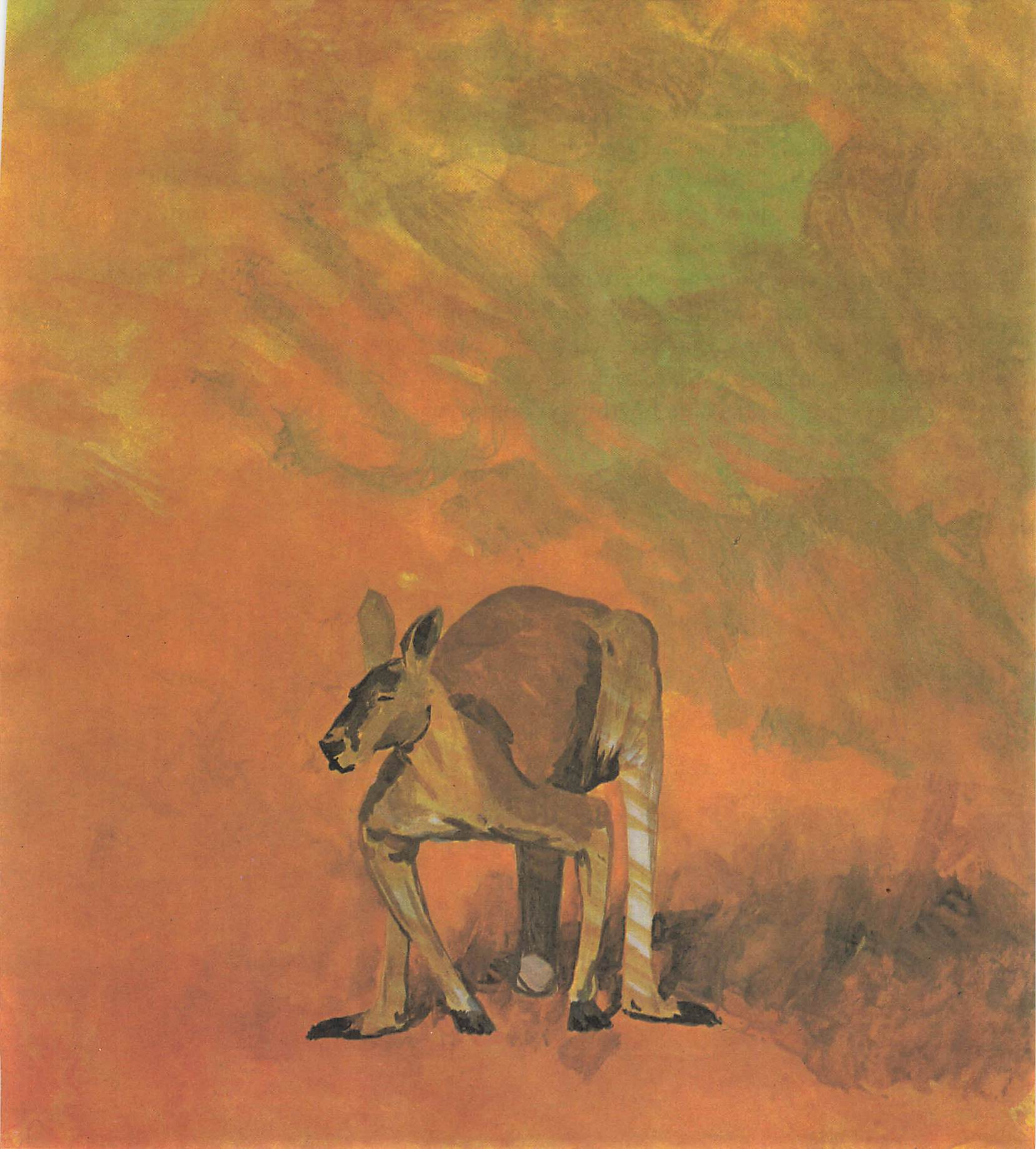
There was more dust now than the kangaroos could raise. Red dust was swirling everywhere. It swirled through the last few rays of the afternoon sun. The man who had stood up on the Rock was right. Rufus was caught in a storm of thick red dust!

He couldn't see at all. Only his ears and nostrils could help him now, but his nostrils, too, were filled with the smell of the dust. It choked his nose and blocked out the scent of the other kangaroos.

His ears turned round, each turning to a different side, so he could pick up the slightest sound. He strained to hear some sound through the dust that would tell him the way to go.

Then he heard it! The faintest booming sound that told him where the others were. It was more than a sound—it was a feeling in the ground. The ground vibrated with the booming sound of the strong hind legs of Big Red kangaroos.

When he was sure of the way, Rufus hopped off quickly, following where he could hear the sound. It was a hard struggle through the swirling dust. He almost choked as he struggled on, but he kept on hopping as fast as he could go.

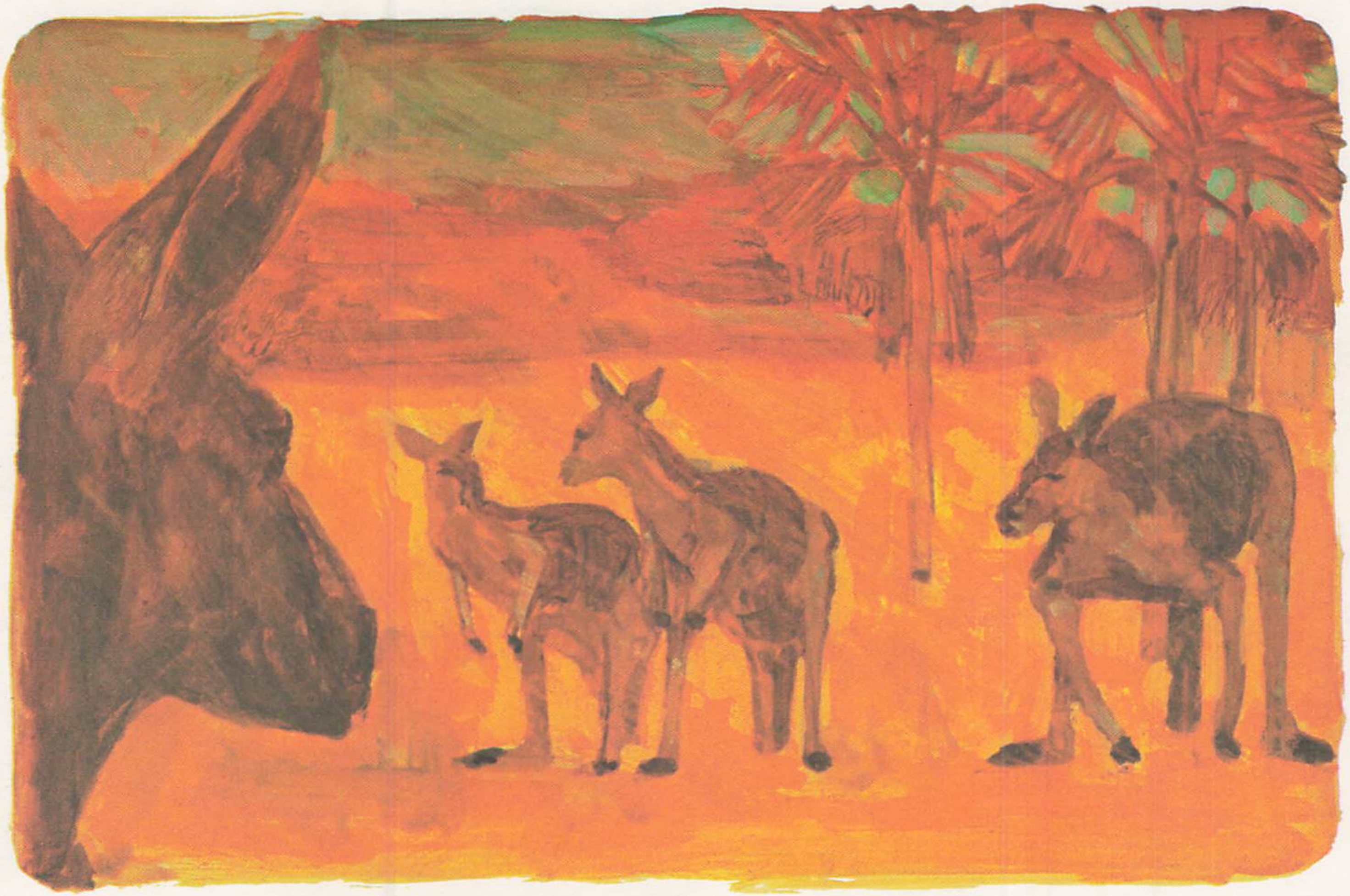


Then, through the dust, he saw dark shapes, the figures of other kangaroos—his mother and his father, and all the rest of the pack. They had stopped at some trees in the shelter of a clump of rocks.

BOOM—BOOM—BOOM! Rufus almost flew over the ground and at last he stood amongst them, tired out from the journey and the dust, but very glad to see them all again.

Then he saw that they were standing with their heads bent down low to the ground. He saw that they were drinking water and eating grass!

Overhead were palm-trees, large and strong and very old. Under-foot was sandy soil, with a few rocks around a tiny pool. It was only small, but the water meant life for thirsty kangaroos. Around the pool grew



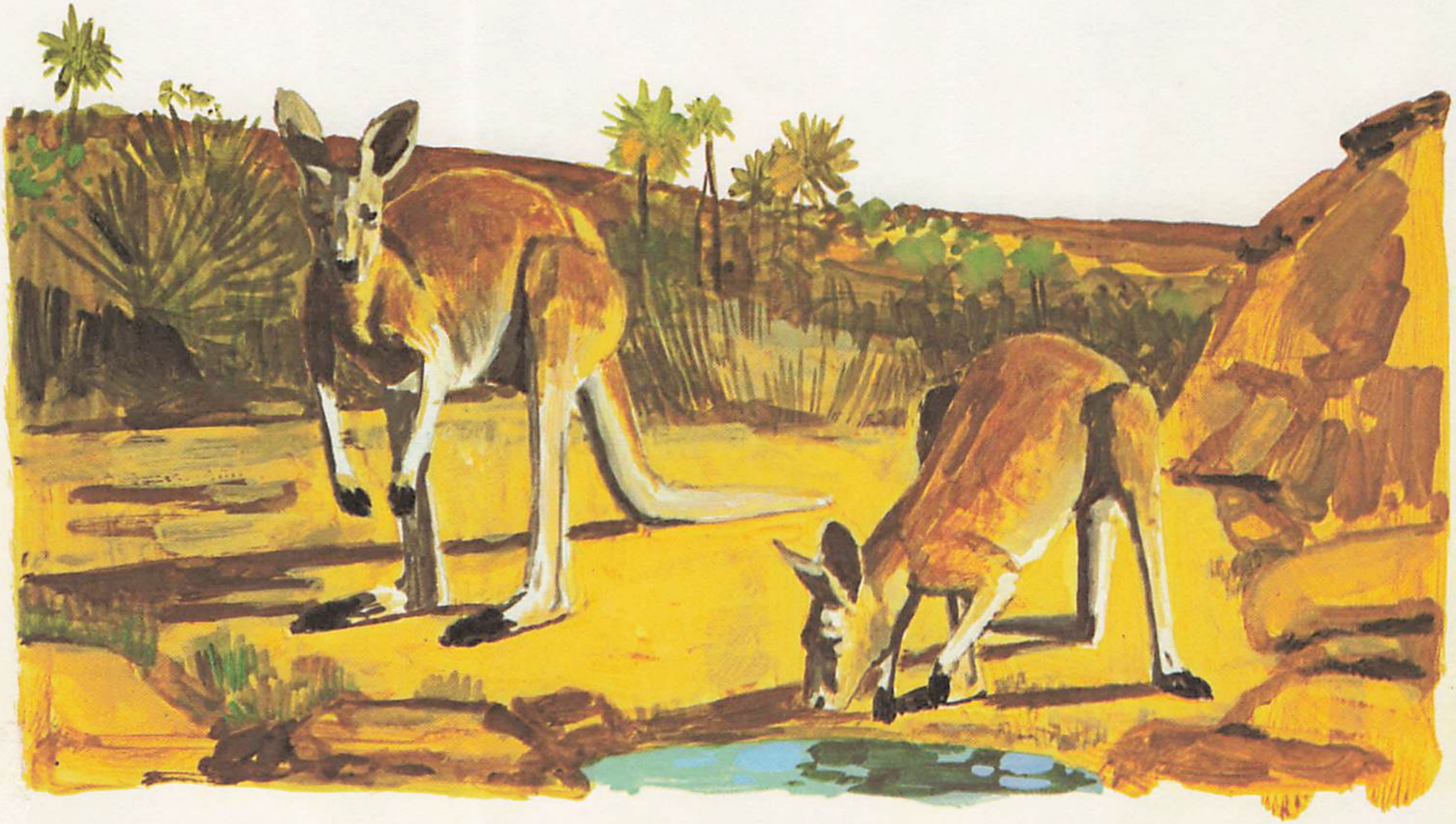
clumps of grass—only a few, but they meant food for hungry kangaroos.

Rufus joined the others, lapping the water with his tongue in the way a cat drinks milk. The dust in his nostrils disappeared as he chewed the blades of fresh green grass. The kangaroos ate hungrily, but there was enough for all.

The next day, once again, there was no food. There was still water in the pool, but all the grass was gone.

The kangaroos rested in the shade. More grass would grow, but not for a very long time. The water came from an underground spring. Under the palms there was always a pool, but now there was no grass. That was all the Big Reds knew.

Tonight they would go back to the Rock, but during the day they would rest in the shade of the palms.



Rufus felt better than he had for a very long time. To live he needed water and food, and last night he had had both. He rested near the older kangaroos. They knew that he was grown-up, now, at last. He had made the long journey alone, and found his own way through the dust. He was not afraid of the journey back to the Rock.

Far away across the plain, the Rock stood as always, very still, with people climbing up its side.

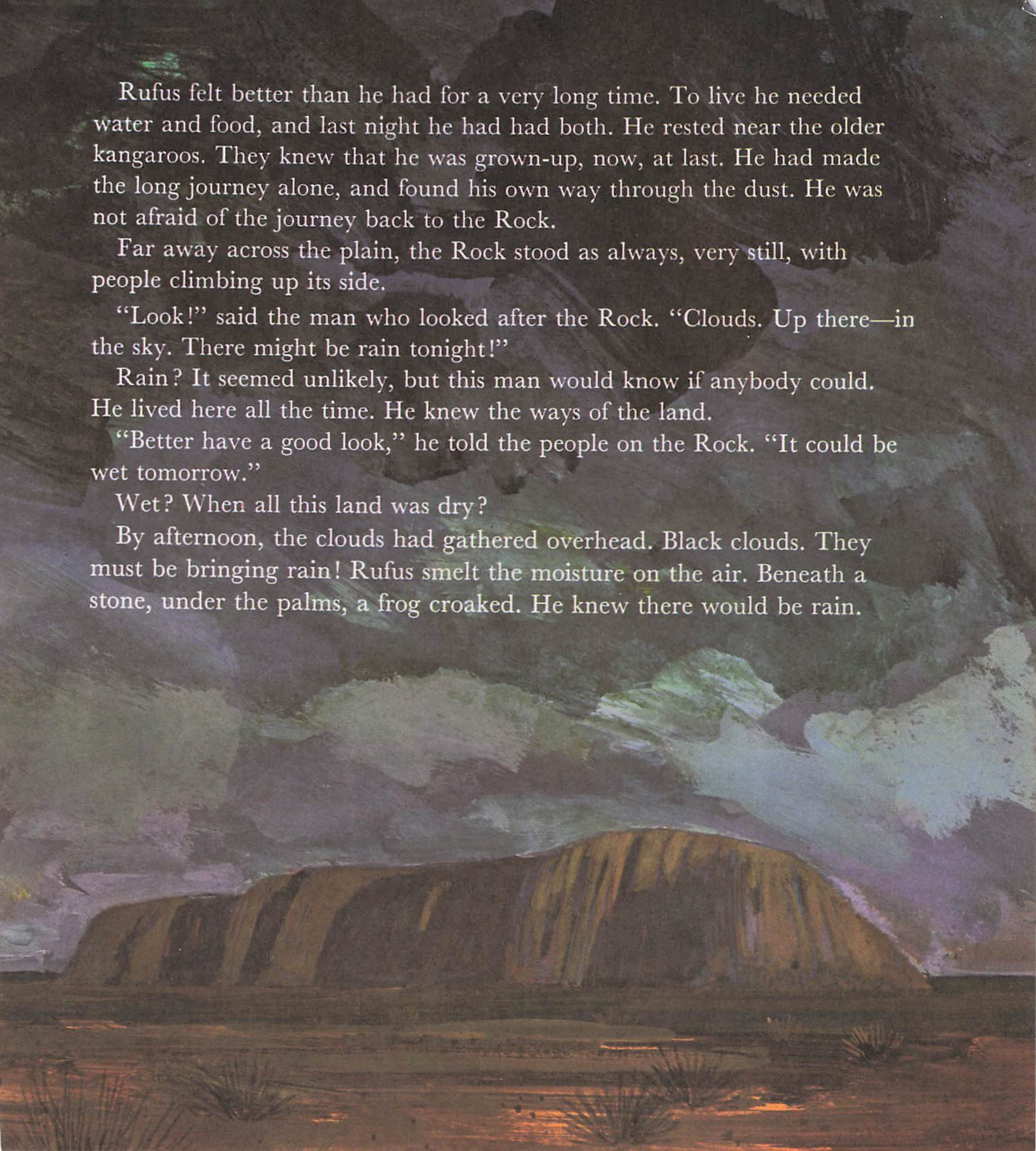
"Look!" said the man who looked after the Rock. "Clouds. Up there—in the sky. There might be rain tonight!"

Rain? It seemed unlikely, but this man would know if anybody could. He lived here all the time. He knew the ways of the land.

"Better have a good look," he told the people on the Rock. "It could be wet tomorrow."

Wet? When all this land was dry?

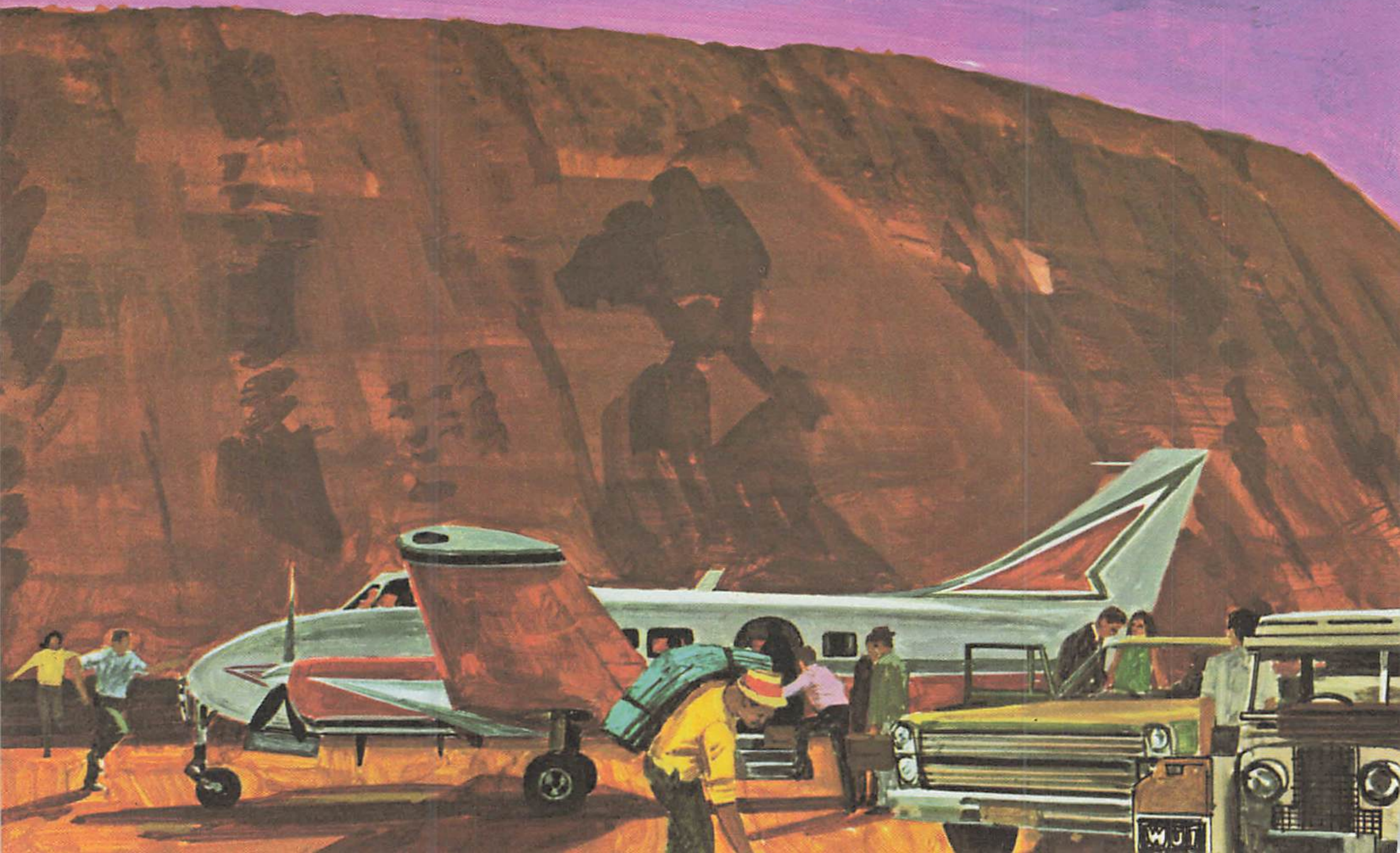
By afternoon, the clouds had gathered overhead. Black clouds. They must be bringing rain! Rufus smelt the moisture on the air. Beneath a stone, under the palms, a frog croaked. He knew there would be rain.



The kangaroos were off again, the leaders in a bunch. The rest of the pack must follow. Rufus set off eagerly. This time he would keep up! His tail like a rudder held high in the air, his hind legs bounced across the ground. BOOM—BOOM—BOOM—BOOM! His nostrils quivered with the smell of rain.

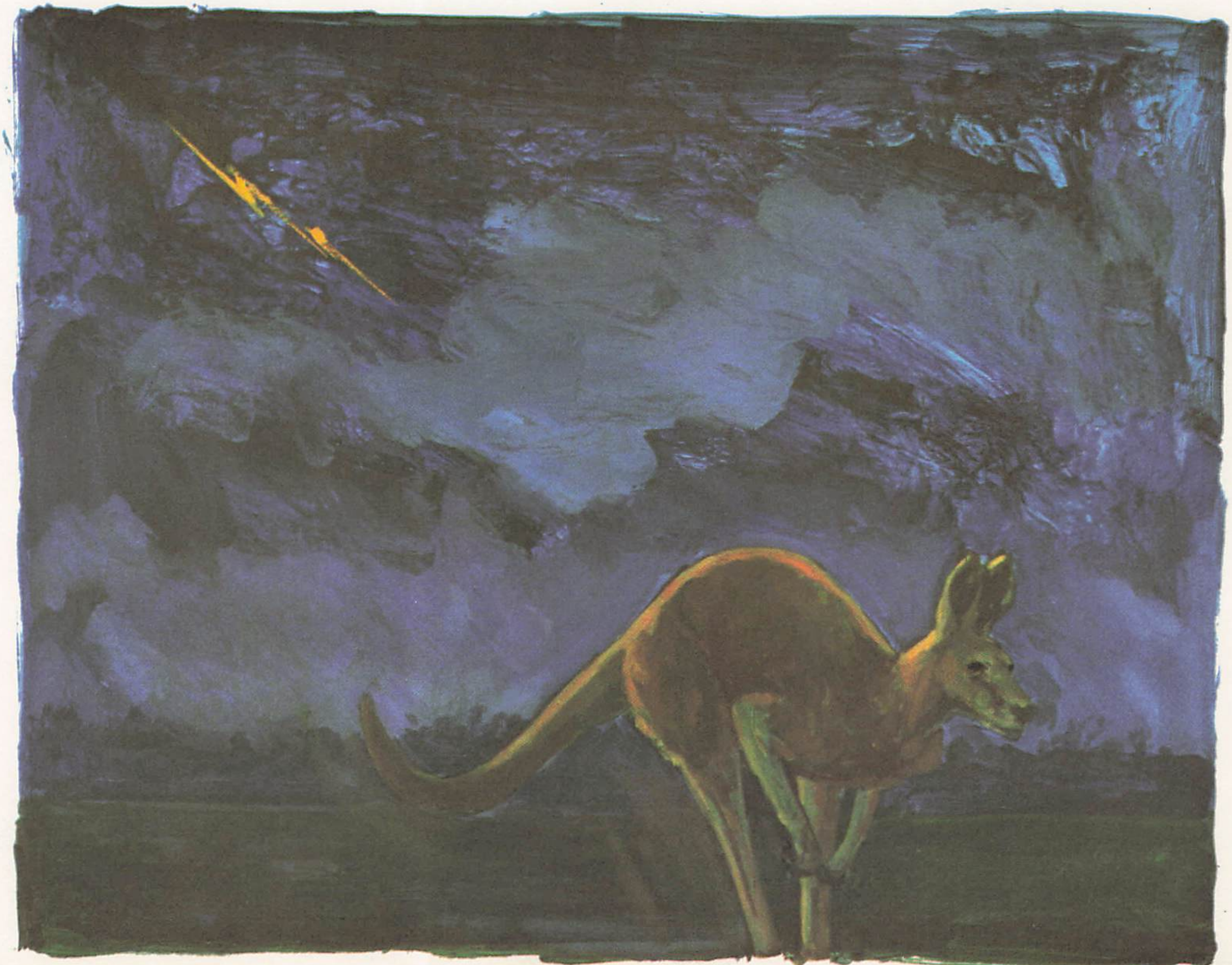
Then another booming noise was heard. BOOM—CRACK—BOOM! There was thunder in the clouds. The clouds were talking to each other, and Rufus understood. There would be booming sounds, and flashing lights, and then there would be *rain*!

KRARK! KRARK! Near the Rock, the crows were calling to the rain. The people gathered all their goods into their cars. The aeroplane took off before the storm. Windows were shut in all the huts. Everyone was ready for the rain.



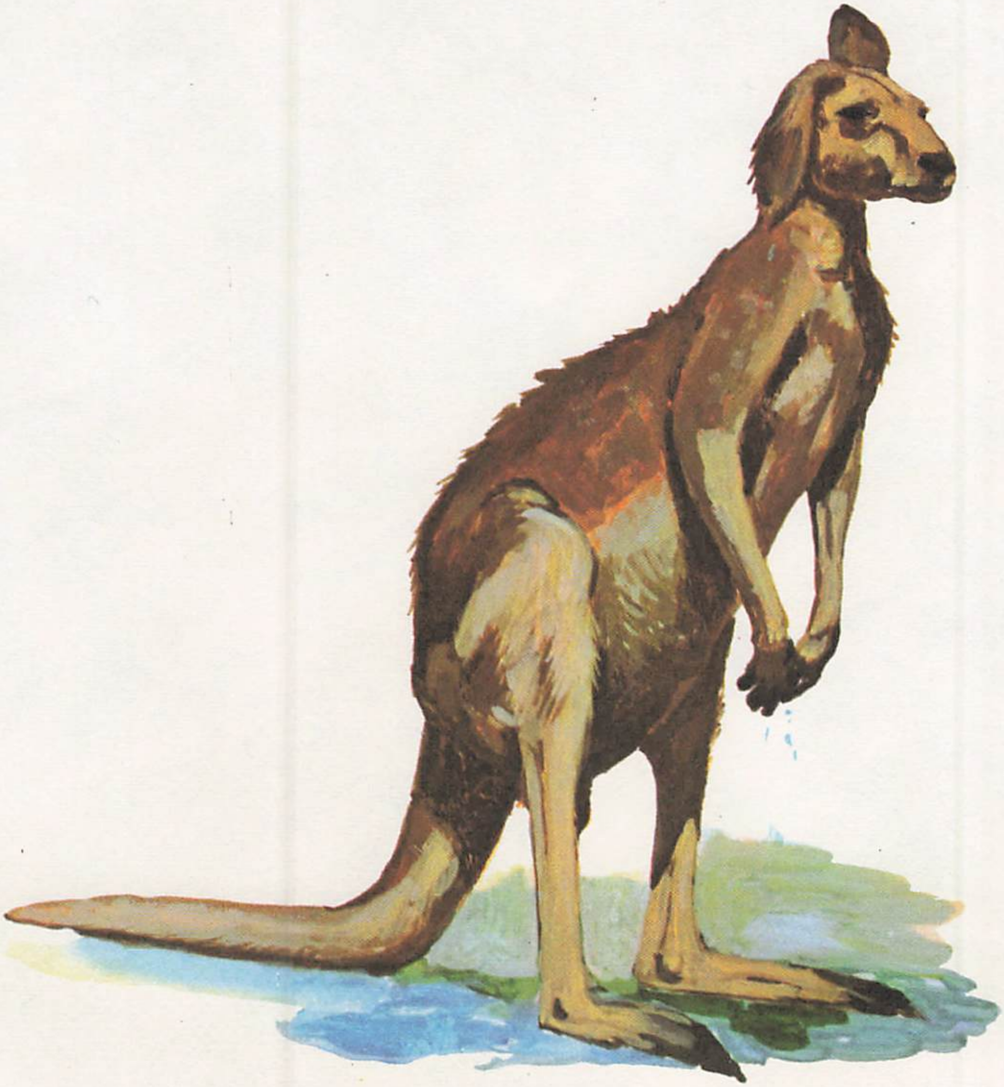
Rufus was hopping with the rest. This time he could keep up! Then suddenly, a drop of rain fell on his fur, one of the first of the gathering storm. PLOP! It fell on Rufus's back, and rolled down off his fur. He shivered with delight, but he hopped on, to keep up with the rest.

Then the lightning came, and with it, thunder, booming closer still. The storm was moving overhead. FLASH! The lightning shot across the sky and lighted all the plain. By now the sun had gone, and left the storm to battle on alone.



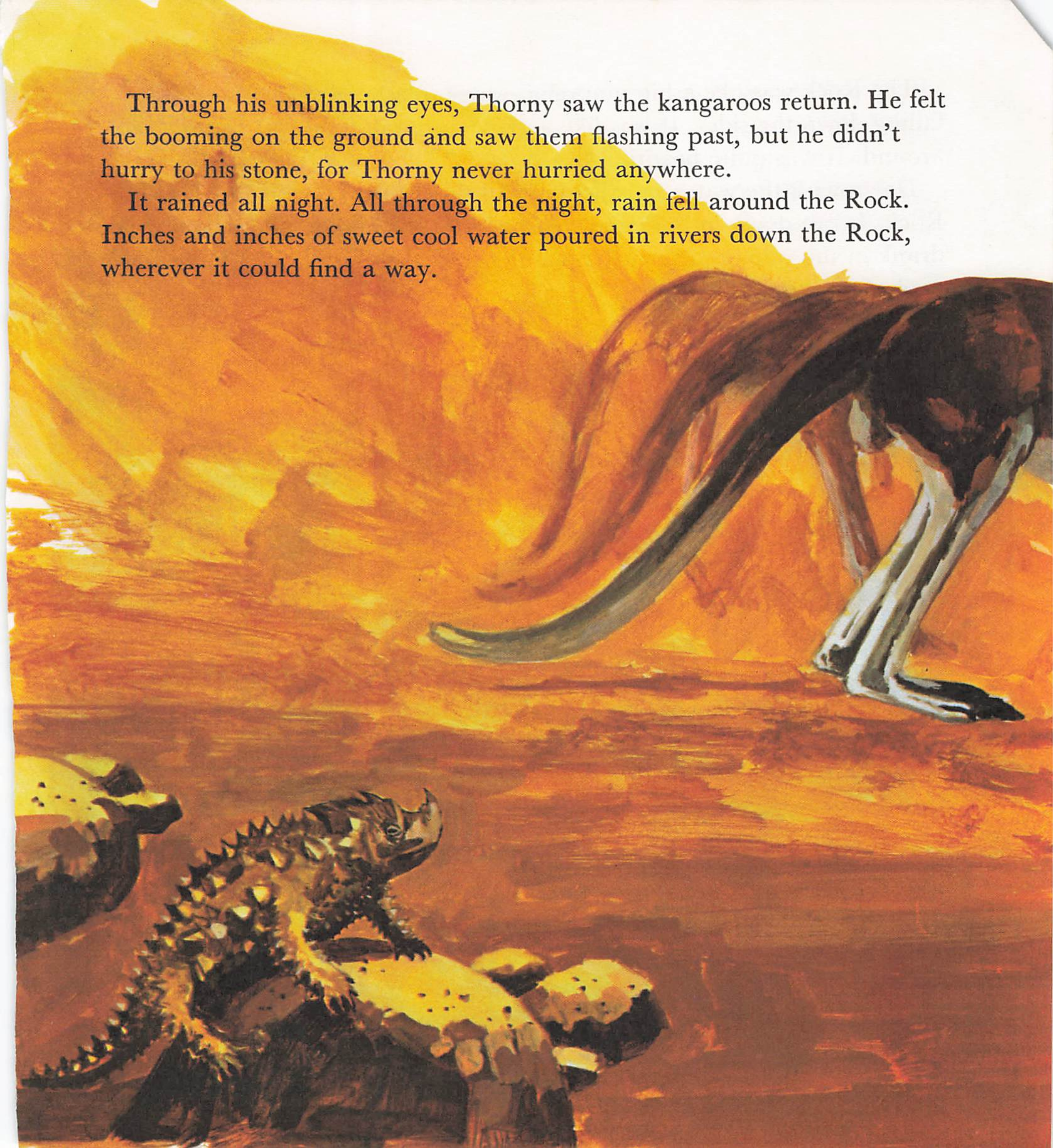
Rufus kept on hopping. The rain was falling faster now. The drops were not so large, but there were many more of them. His fur stood up in patches, and roads of rain ran down his back, but he felt light and cool. The dust of many weeks washed down his legs and plopped in puddles on the ground. It was raining hard!

Not much farther to the mulga now. Not much farther to the ghost-white gums that stood beside the Rock. The kangaroos would shelter there all night. Rufus had kept up all the way.



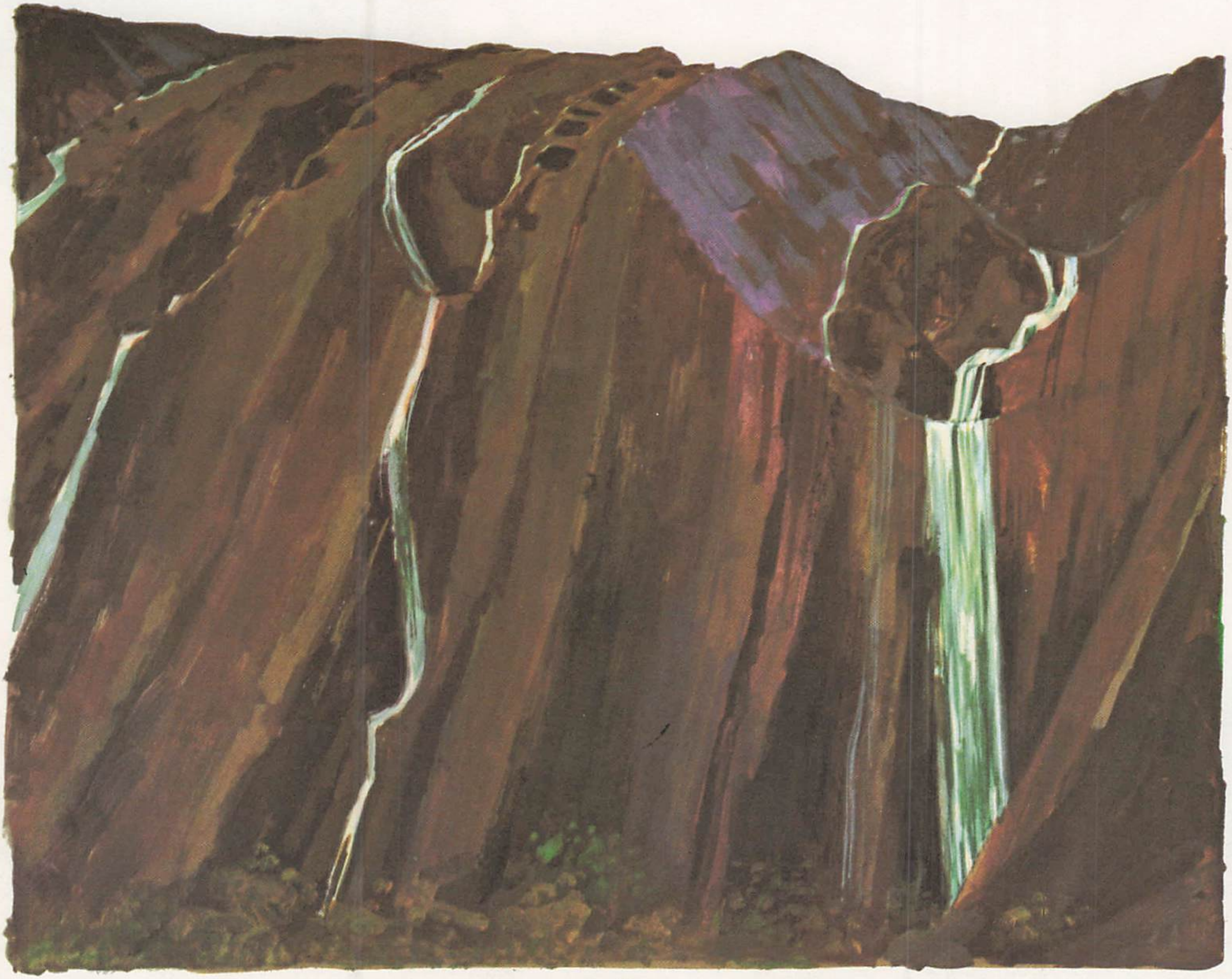
Through his unblinking eyes, Thorny saw the kangaroos return. He felt the booming on the ground and saw them flashing past, but he didn't hurry to his stone, for Thorny never hurried anywhere.

It rained all night. All through the night, rain fell around the Rock. Inches and inches of sweet cool water poured in rivers down the Rock, wherever it could find a way.



The Rock was like a big umbrella, water splashing off the top and falling down the sides. It was like a giant waterfall with water falling all around. It was quite beautiful to see.

Down with the water ran the dust, all the dust that had settled on the Rock. It ran down in lines and splashed on the ground. The thirsty earth drank in the rain, and then the puddles started to form. Soon there was a pool of mud.



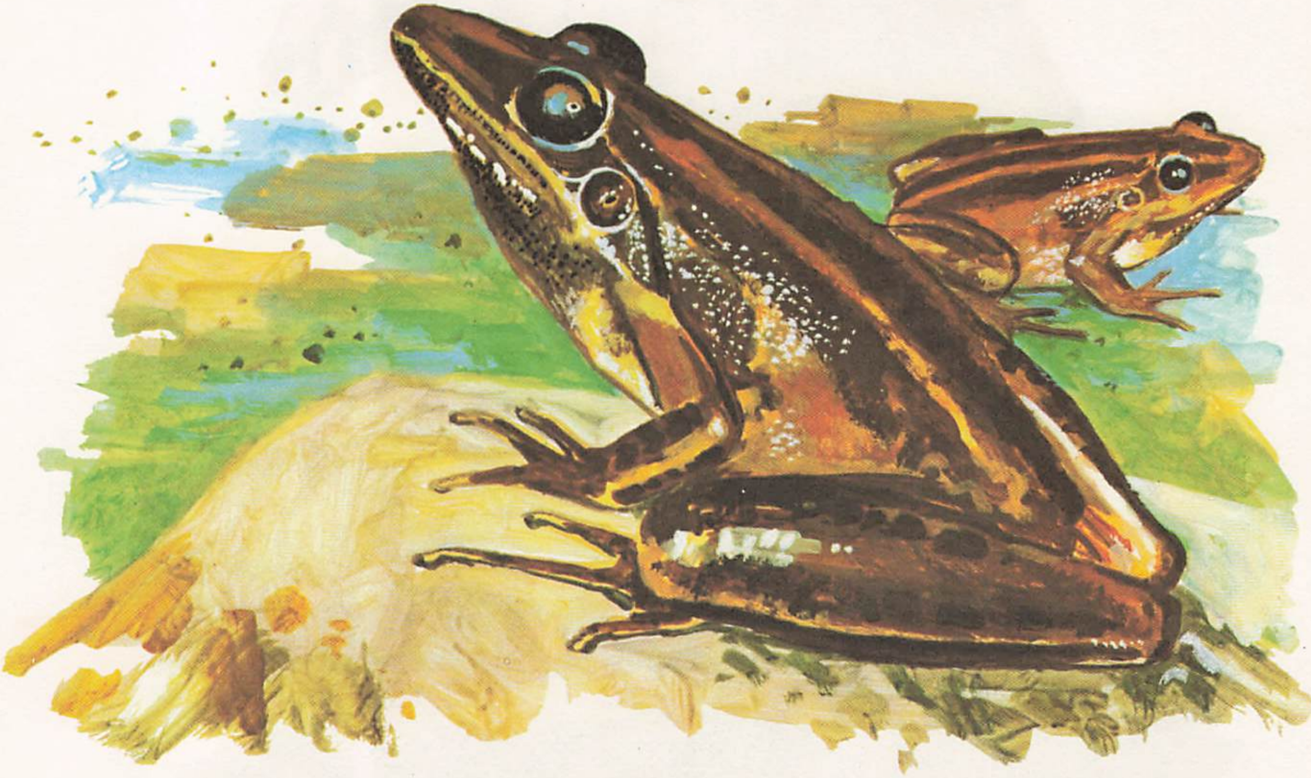
The dust ran off the bonnets of the cars; the roofs of all the buses were washed clean. When morning came, the children walked out in the rain. They took off their shoes and paddled in the mud.

Rufus sheltered underneath the mulga trees with all the other kangaroos. The air was cooler now than it had been for months. He shivered and shook the water from his fur.

Now the air felt fresh and clean—there was no smell of dust at all. Rufus felt a little strange, the strange feeling of dampness after the months of being dry, but he felt very clean.

Lizards like Thorny hid under their rocks, but frogs came out from secret holes to croak a welcome to the rain.

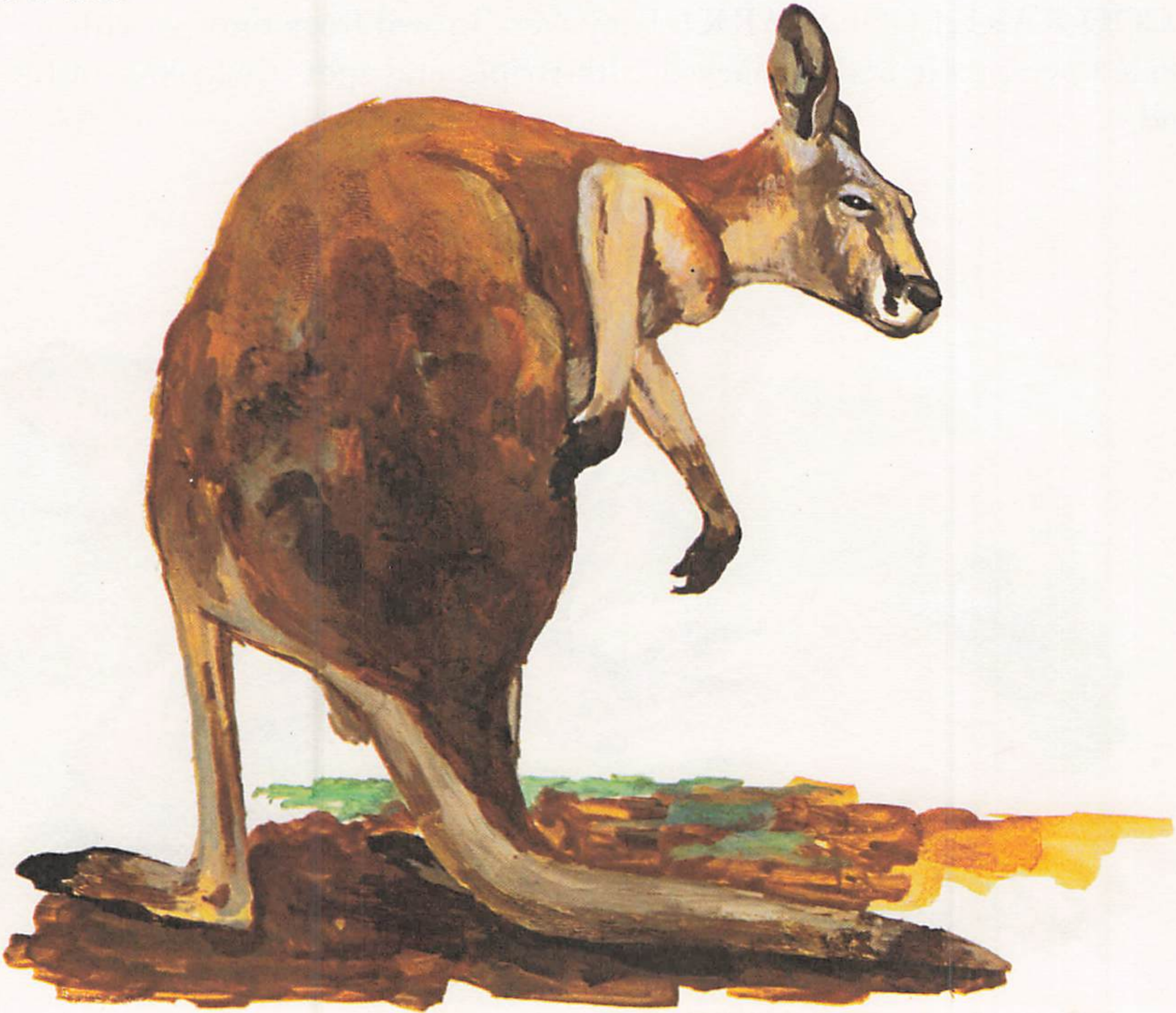
COO-RARK! COO-RARK! They were brown frogs mostly, with hooded eyes, their bodies marked with stripes and spots the colour of the land.



Up on the Rock, the rain was gushing down, filling all the cracks with water, and pouring into the bottomless crevices you could never fill. It filled the little pools, and brought a welcome drink to tiny trees that clung all alone in steep places.

All over the Rock were little waterfalls, and rivers, creeks, and flowing streams. Forming all shapes, wherever it could run, the water was running everywhere, finding the shortest way to the ground. Down! Down! That was the only way it could run, down to the ground to join the muddy pools.

The mud was everywhere. It squelched up into Rufus's paws, and darkened the light grey tip of his tail. It was time for the rain to stop—and it did!



The rain stopped as suddenly as it began. Rufus sniffed the air and looked around. No drops were falling on his fur. The air seemed very still. The sky was clear, the rain clouds had disappeared, th esun was shining once again.

Around the Rock, the air now had that special freshness after rain. Rufus was clean, the ghost-gums were washed white, the rock where Thorny lived shone clean and sparkling in the sun.

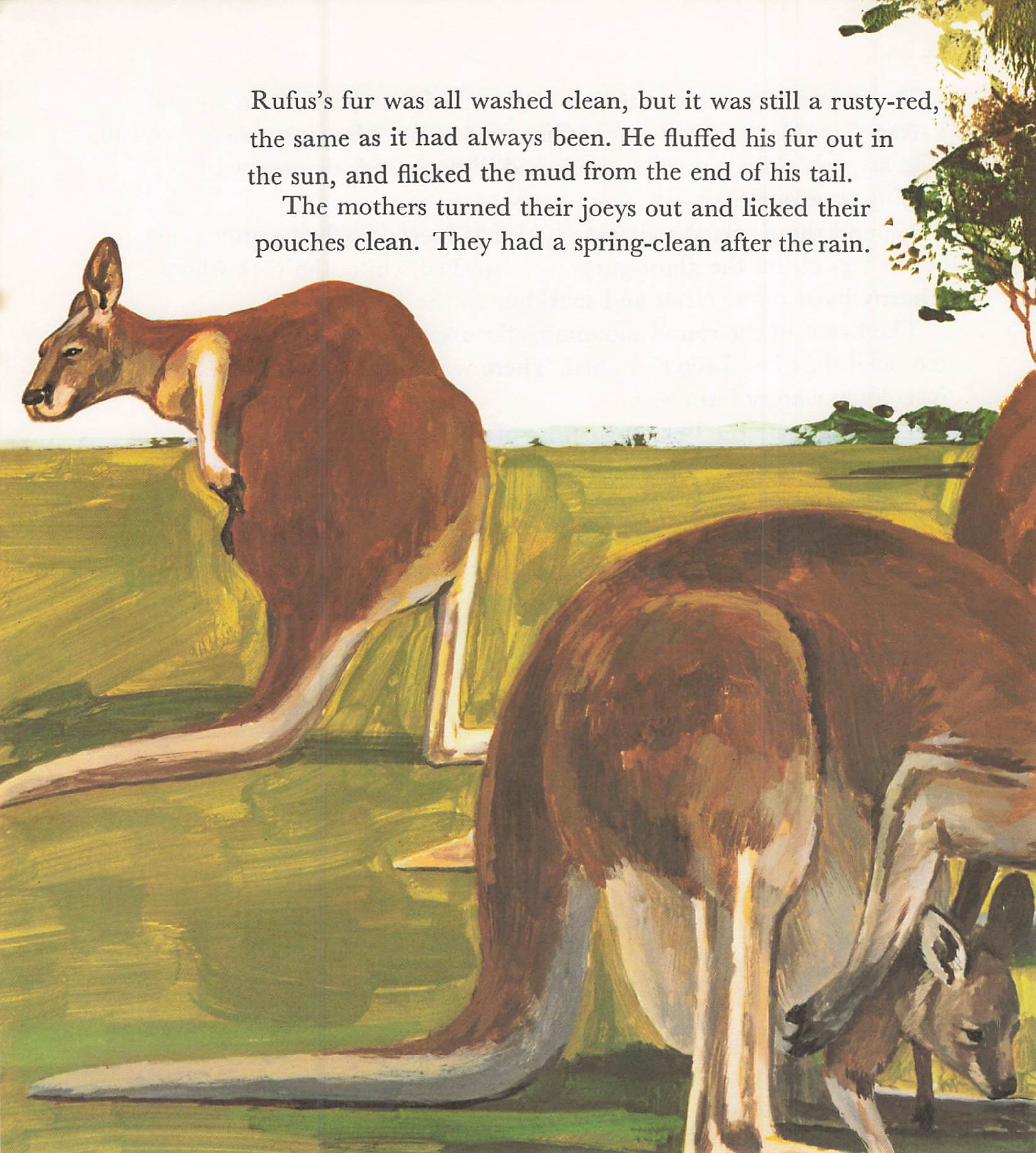
The heads of the round mountains far away looked clean and shining too, as if they had been scrubbed. There was a rainbow curving in the sky, its colours watery but clear.

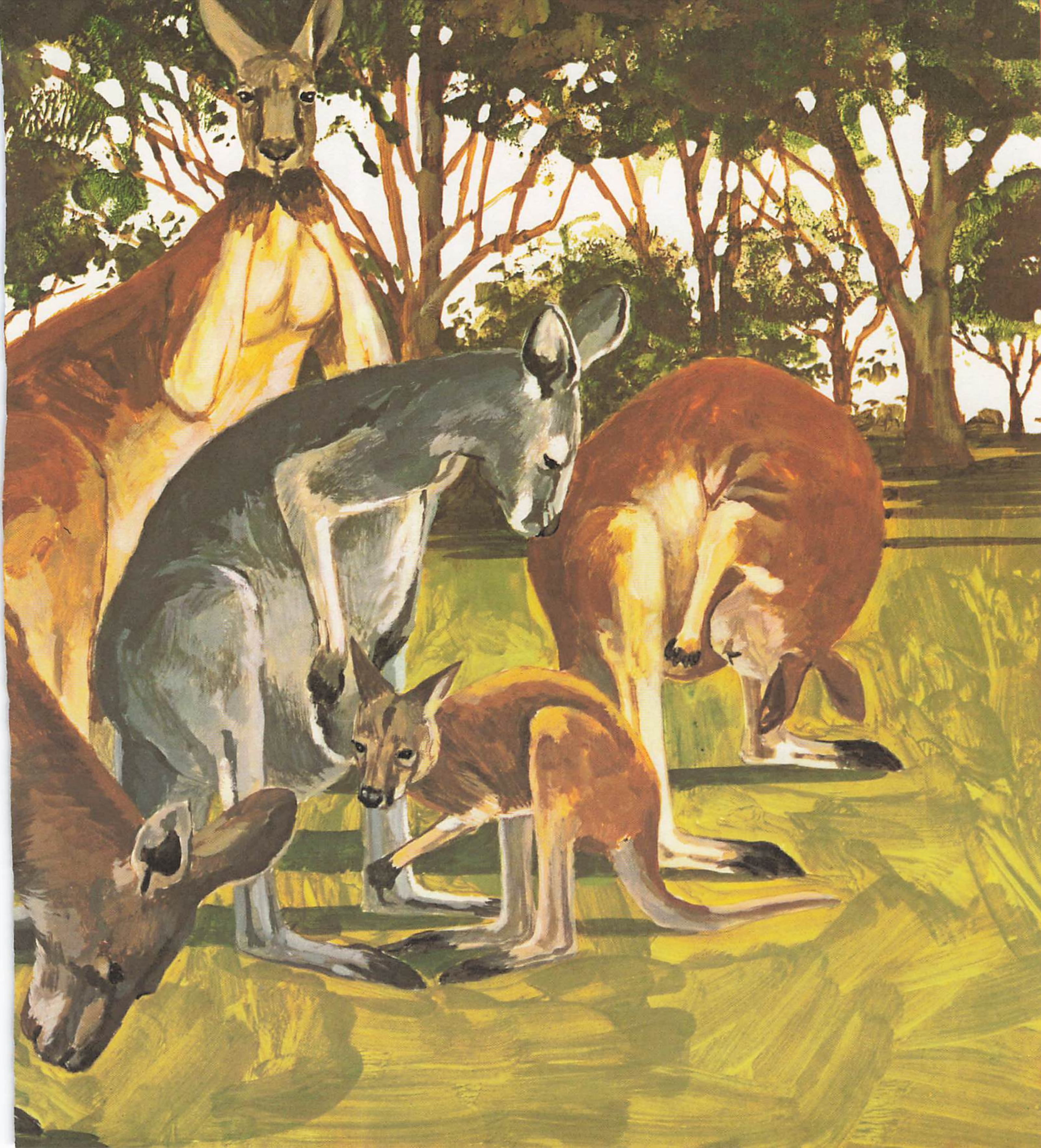
The Rock was the biggest surprise of all. The children saw it shining in the sun. Rufus, who lived here all the time, had never seen it looking quite like this.

It wasn't red at all! It was pink and grey, with streaks of white, light sandy brown with streaks of cream. The colours of the rainbow were reflected in the Rock, which was catching all the colours of the sky. In the Rock itself were lines of colour, patterns carved out by the winds of many years. The Rock had been covered with dust, and now the dust was washed away!

Rufus's fur was all washed clean, but it was still a rusty-red, the same as it had always been. He fluffed his fur out in the sun, and flicked the mud from the end of his tail.

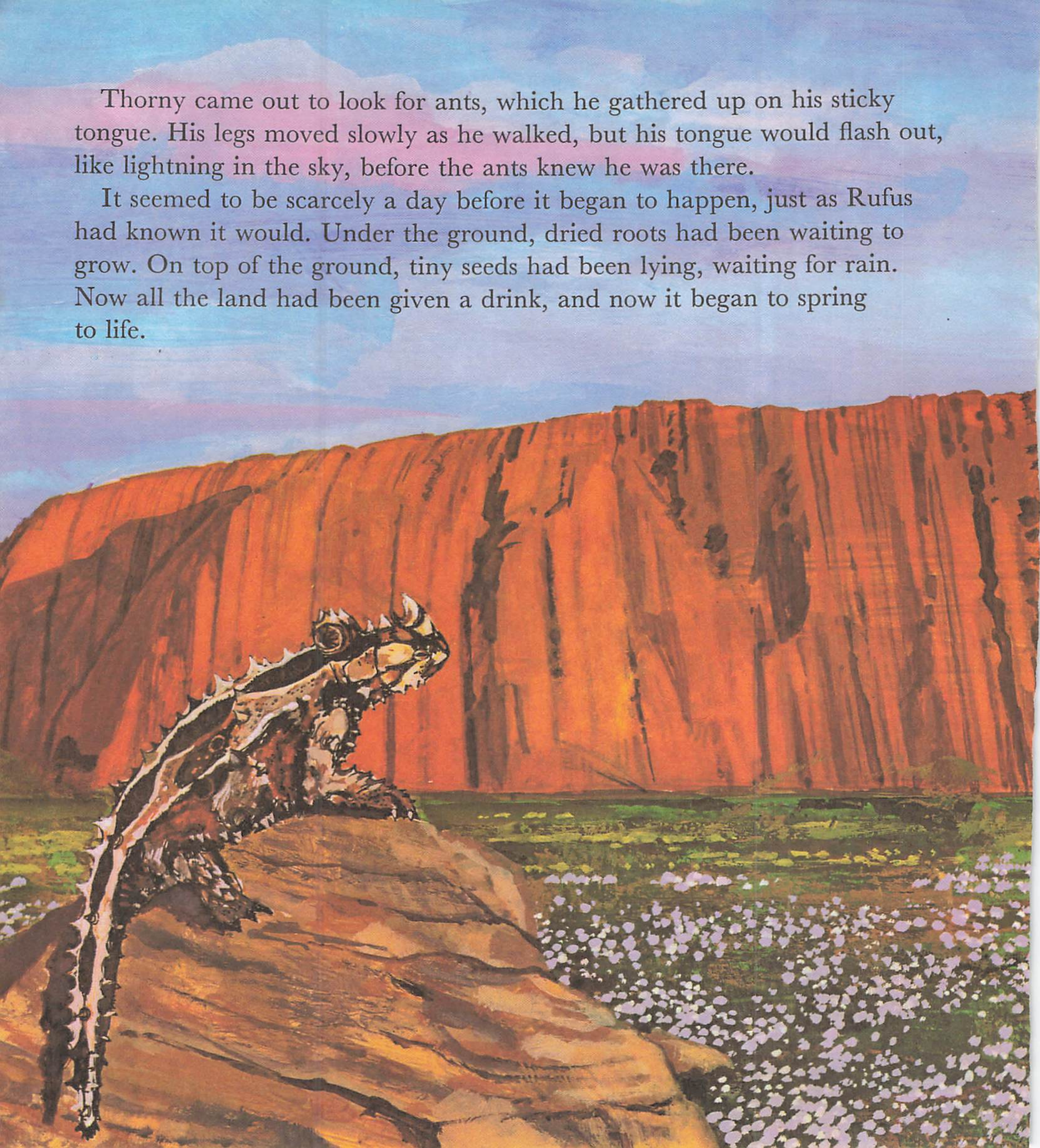
The mothers turned their joeys out and licked their pouches clean. They had a spring-clean after the rain.





Thorny came out to look for ants, which he gathered up on his sticky tongue. His legs moved slowly as he walked, but his tongue would flash out, like lightning in the sky, before the ants knew he was there.

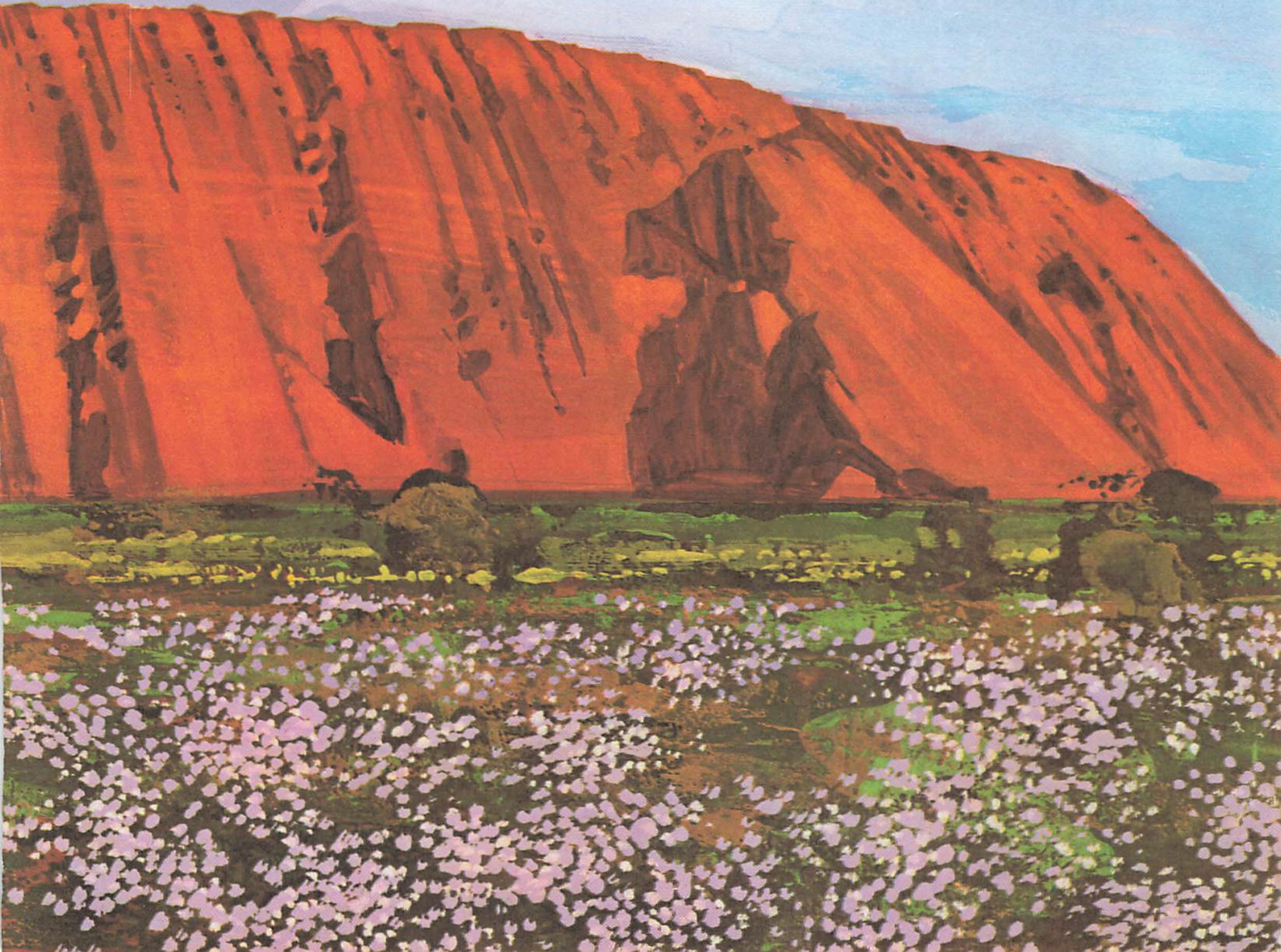
It seemed to be scarcely a day before it began to happen, just as Rufus had known it would. Under the ground, dried roots had been waiting to grow. On top of the ground, tiny seeds had been lying, waiting for rain. Now all the land had been given a drink, and now it began to spring to life.



Tiny green shoots came out of the earth, shoots of grass, and shrubs, and wildflower-plants. Around the Rock was a carpet of green, and a garden of flowers bloomed in the grass.

Then the birds came too—a cloud of budgerigars with scarlet chests, a stately group of brolgas doing their special graceful dance, and pelicans who stood up very straight and looked so grand! Wild geese were honking overhead.

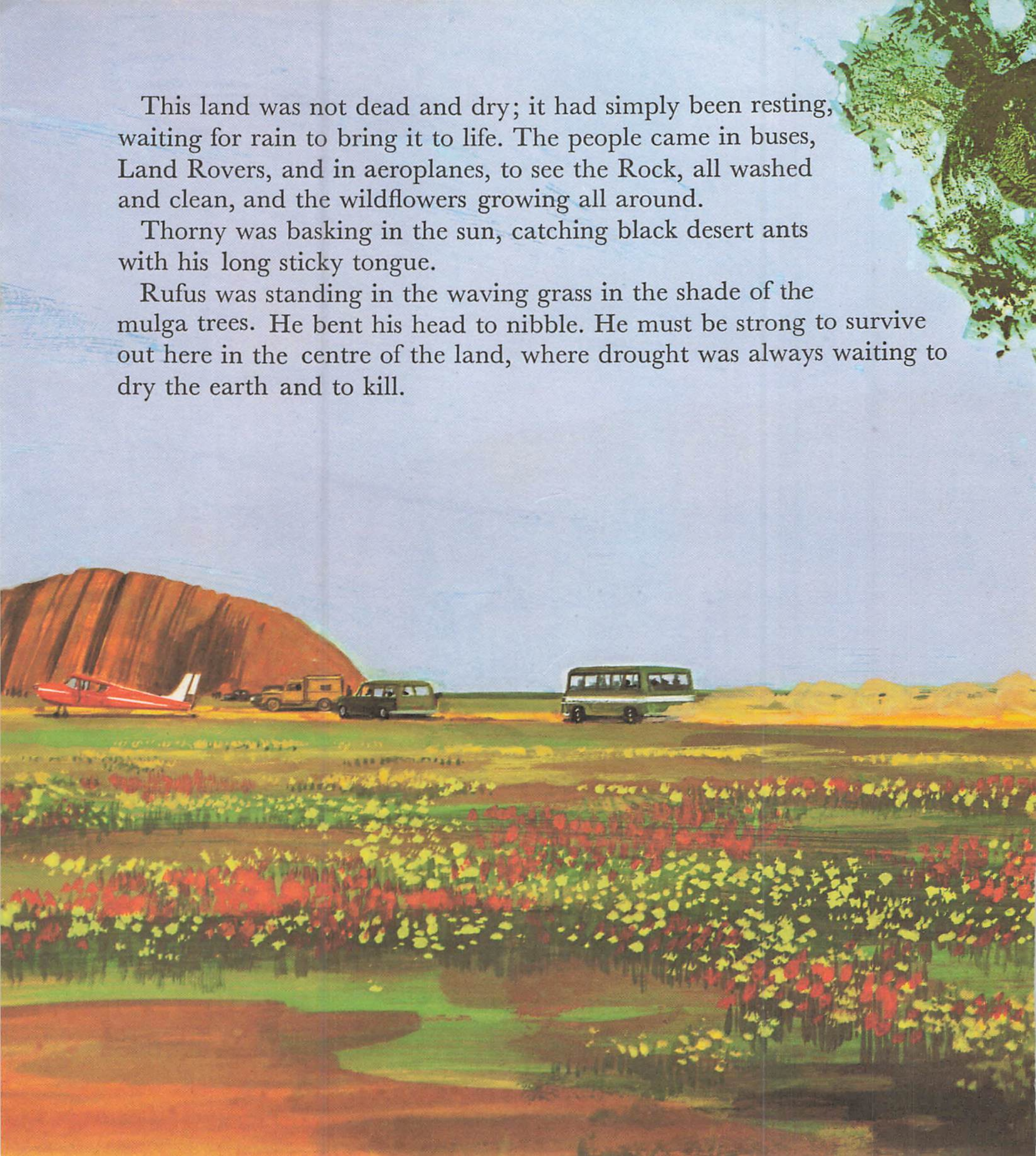
High on the Rock, in pools, were tiny fish, but no one knew how they had come!

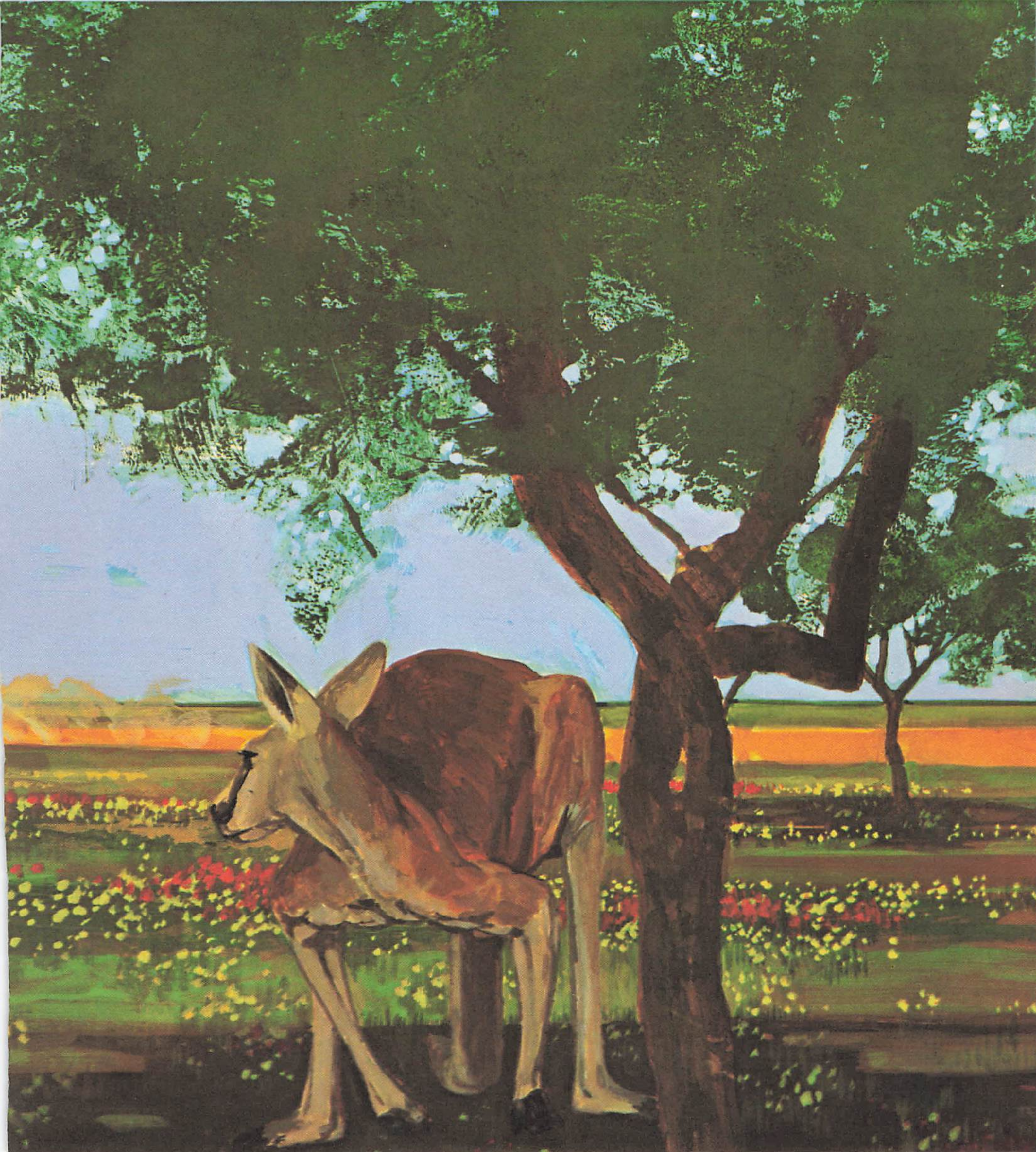


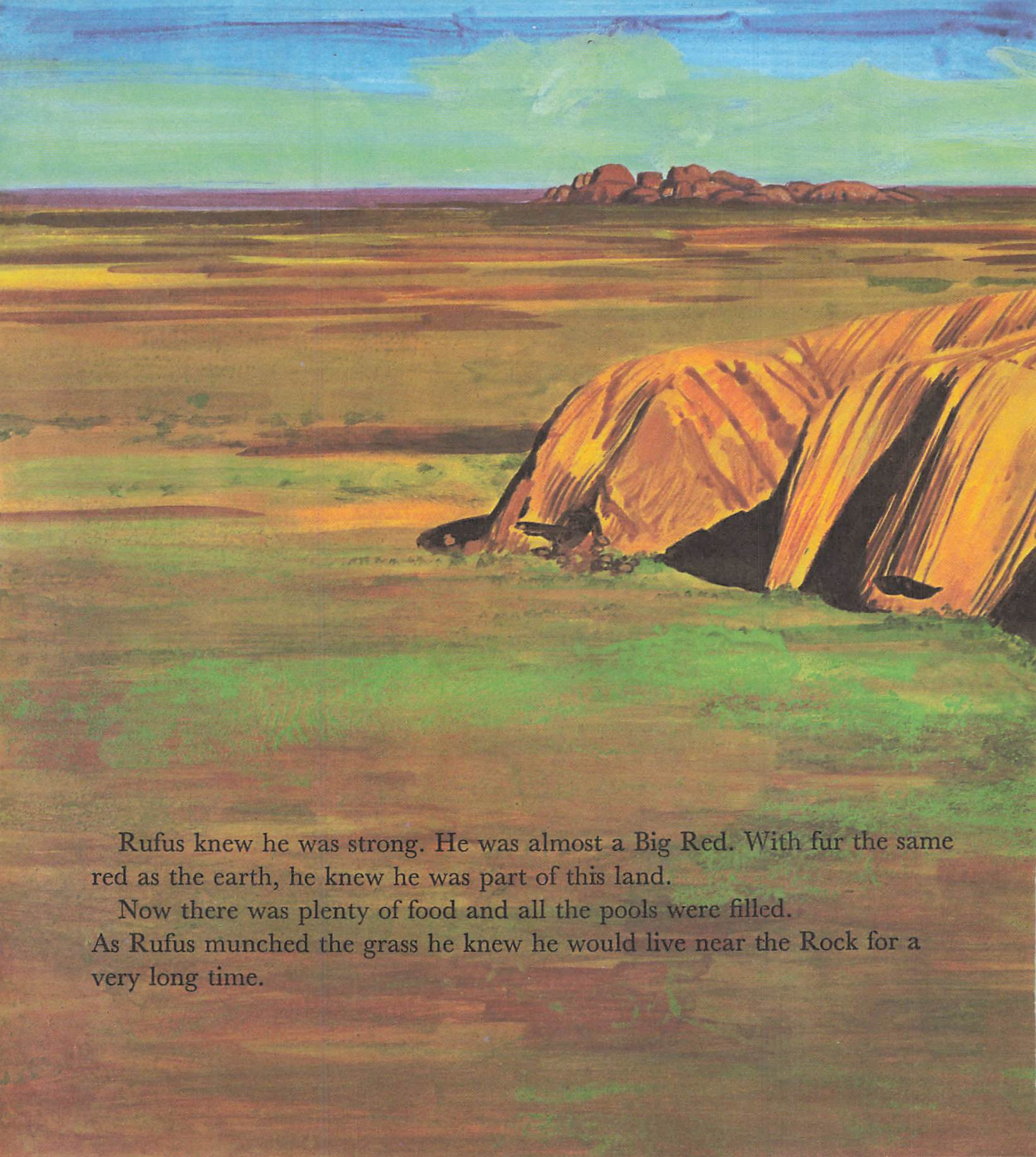
This land was not dead and dry; it had simply been resting, waiting for rain to bring it to life. The people came in buses, Land Rovers, and in aeroplanes, to see the Rock, all washed and clean, and the wildflowers growing all around.

Thorny was basking in the sun, catching black desert ants with his long sticky tongue.

Rufus was standing in the waving grass in the shade of the mulga trees. He bent his head to nibble. He must be strong to survive out here in the centre of the land, where drought was always waiting to dry the earth and to kill.

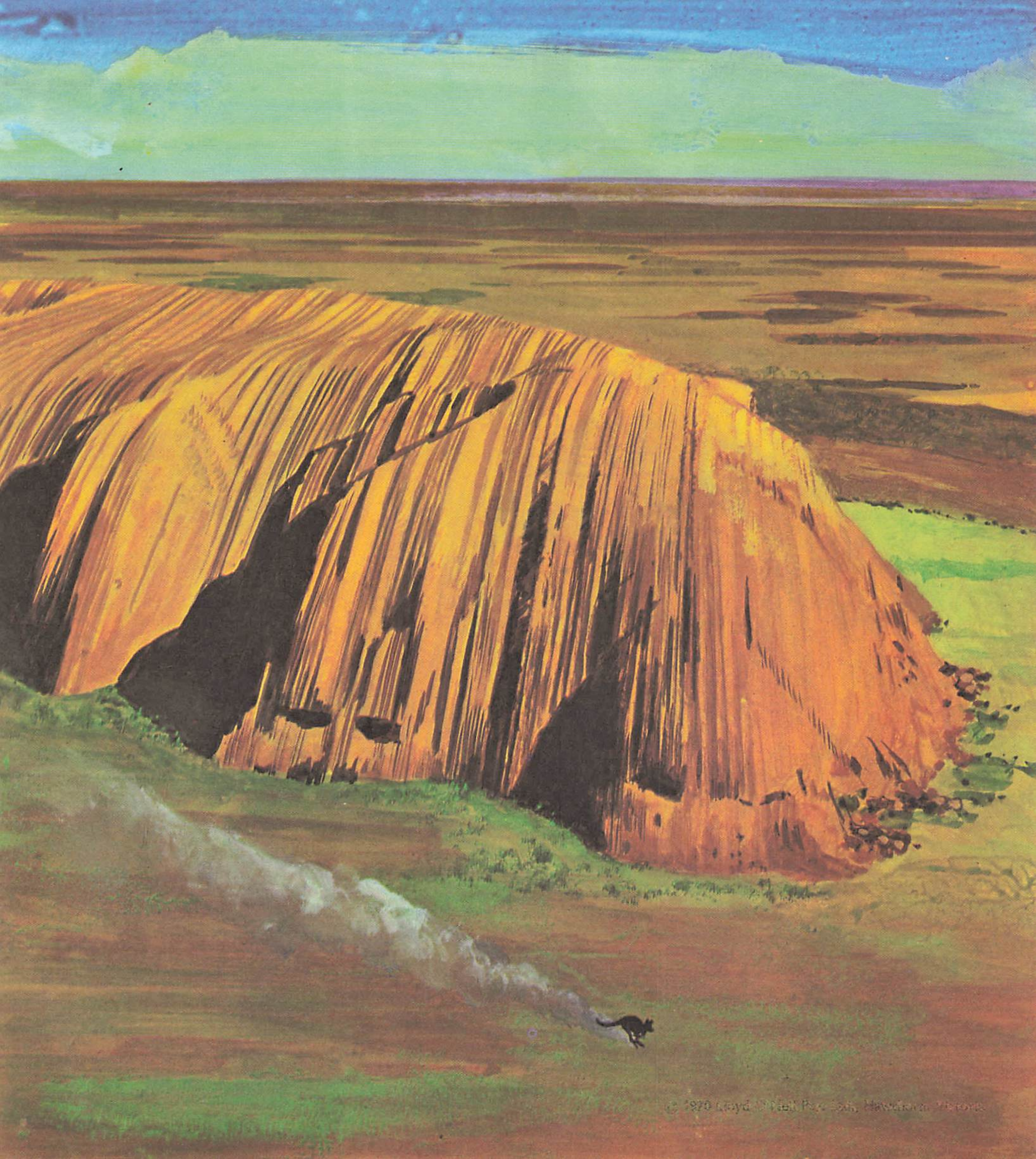






Rufus knew he was strong. He was almost a Big Red. With fur the same red as the earth, he knew he was part of this land.

Now there was plenty of food and all the pools were filled. As Rufus munched the grass he knew he would live near the Rock for a very long time.



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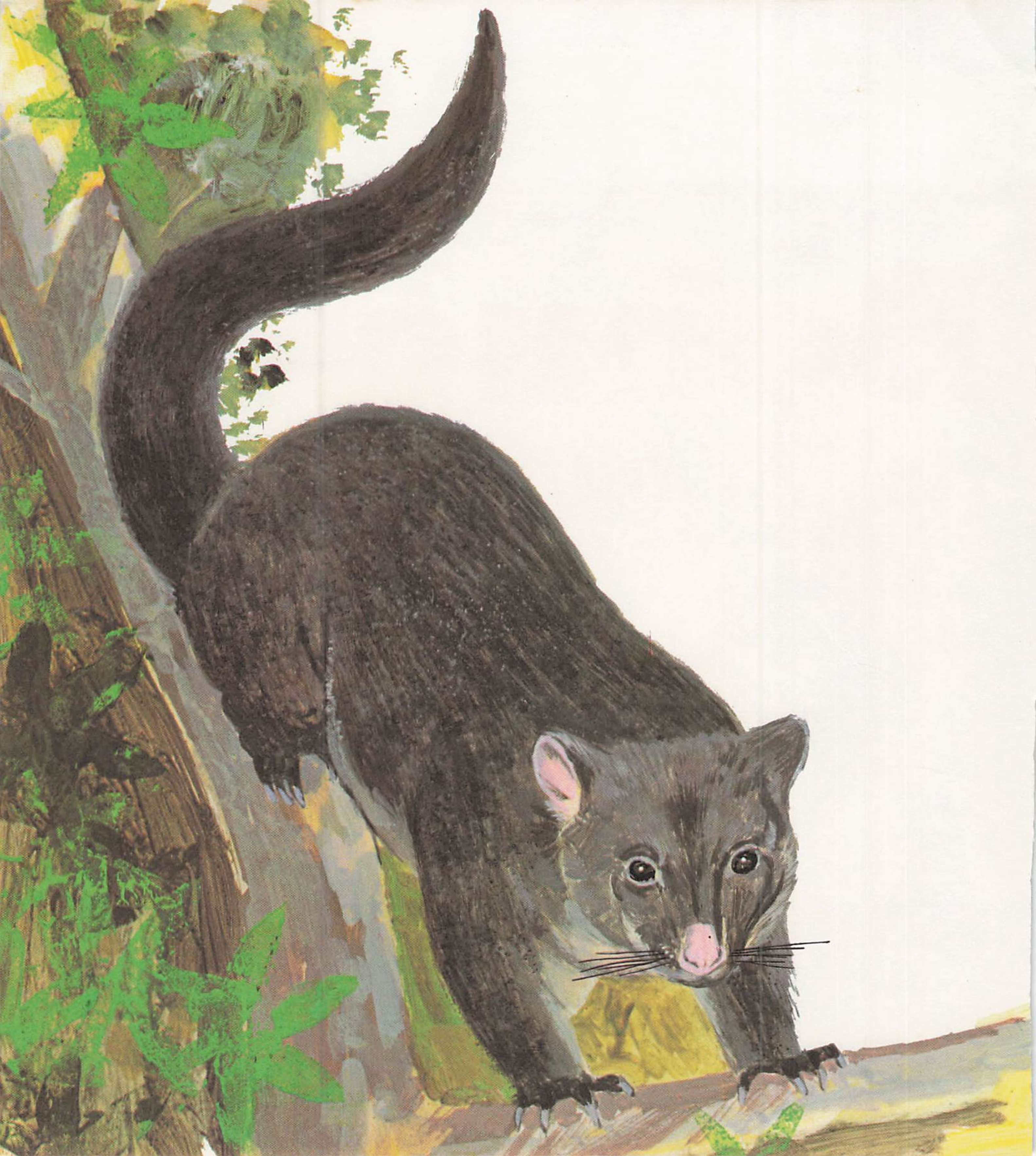
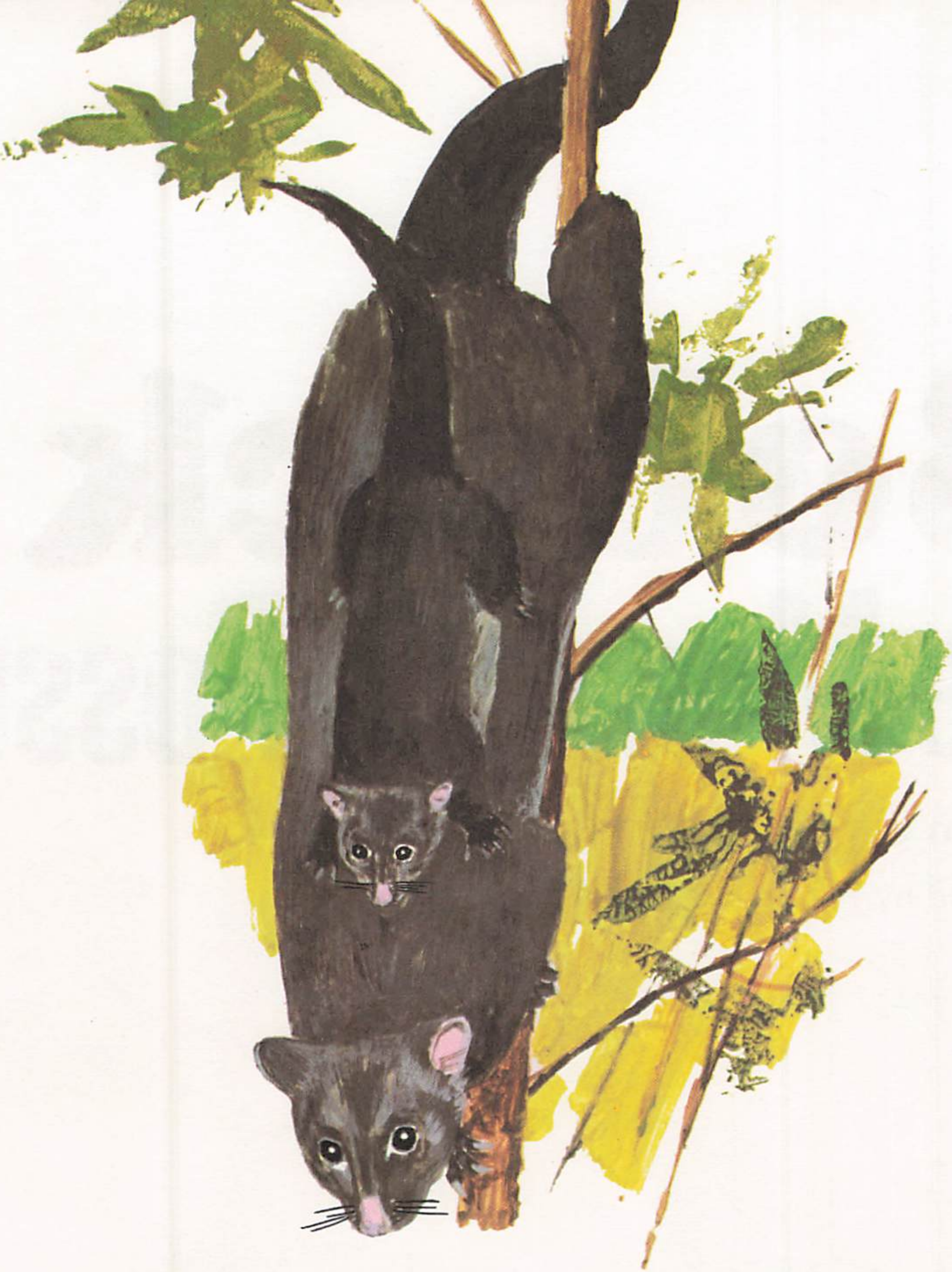


# Bobuck
# the Mountain Possum

Written by Jill Morris

Illustrated by Rich Richardson

GOLDEN PRESS

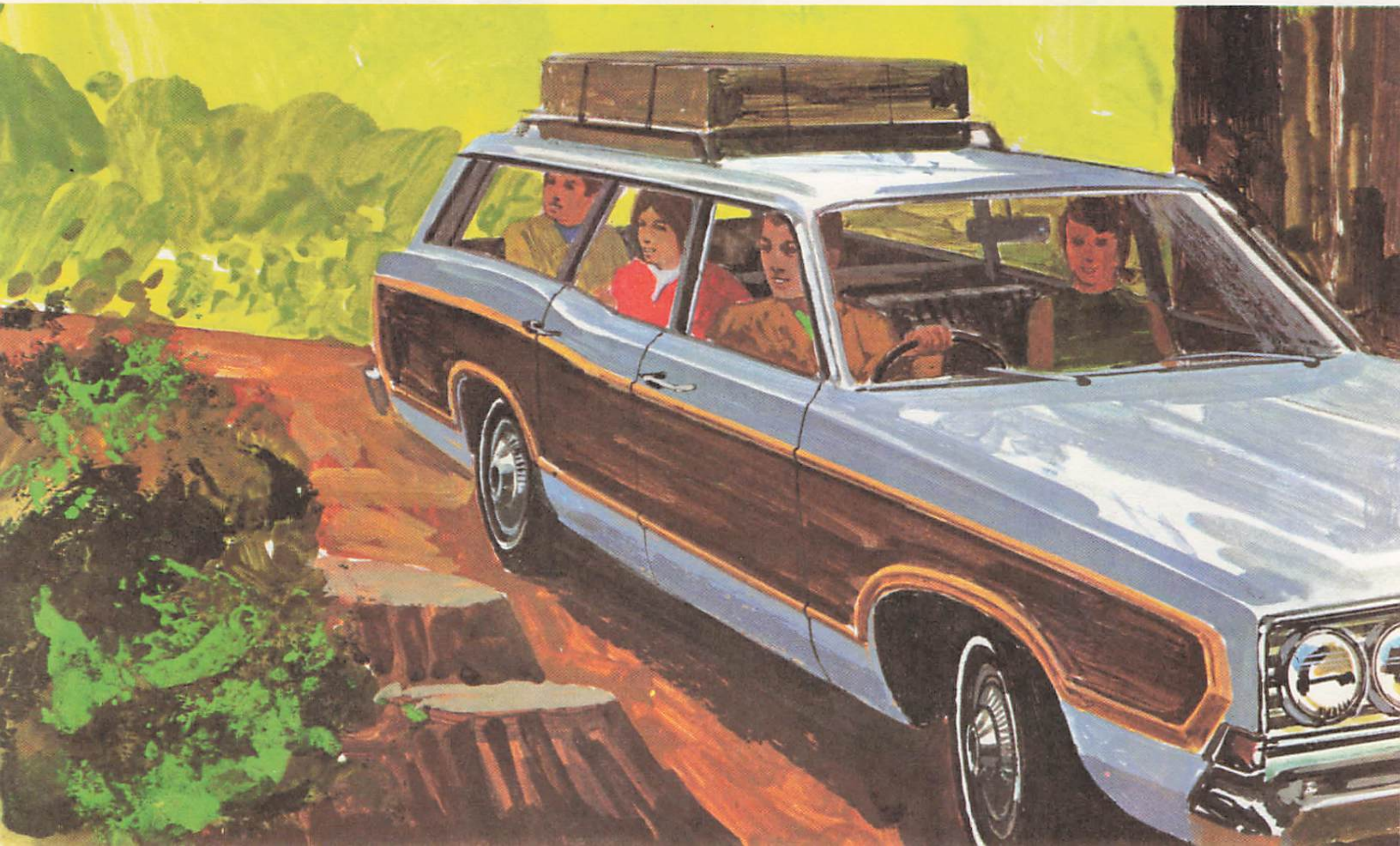


Bobuck skidded along the branch, tail flying, because a monster had just driven under his tree. The bark was slippery and his tiny claws were only just learning to grip its smooth surface, but he almost flew along the branch, his bushy black tail streaming out behind him.

He reached his mother safely and jumped onto her back, clinging to her soft fur with all four feet, his tail lightly wrapped around hers. Now he felt safe. Now he could have a good look at the monster which had disturbed the peace of his quiet home.

Bobuck had never seen one of these monsters before, but his mother had many times. She knew it was just a car—but cars meant campers, and campers meant noise in the daytime when possums like to sleep, and danger at night when possums like to hunt.

But she really liked people. They had never tried to harm her. So she told Bobuck not to be afraid.

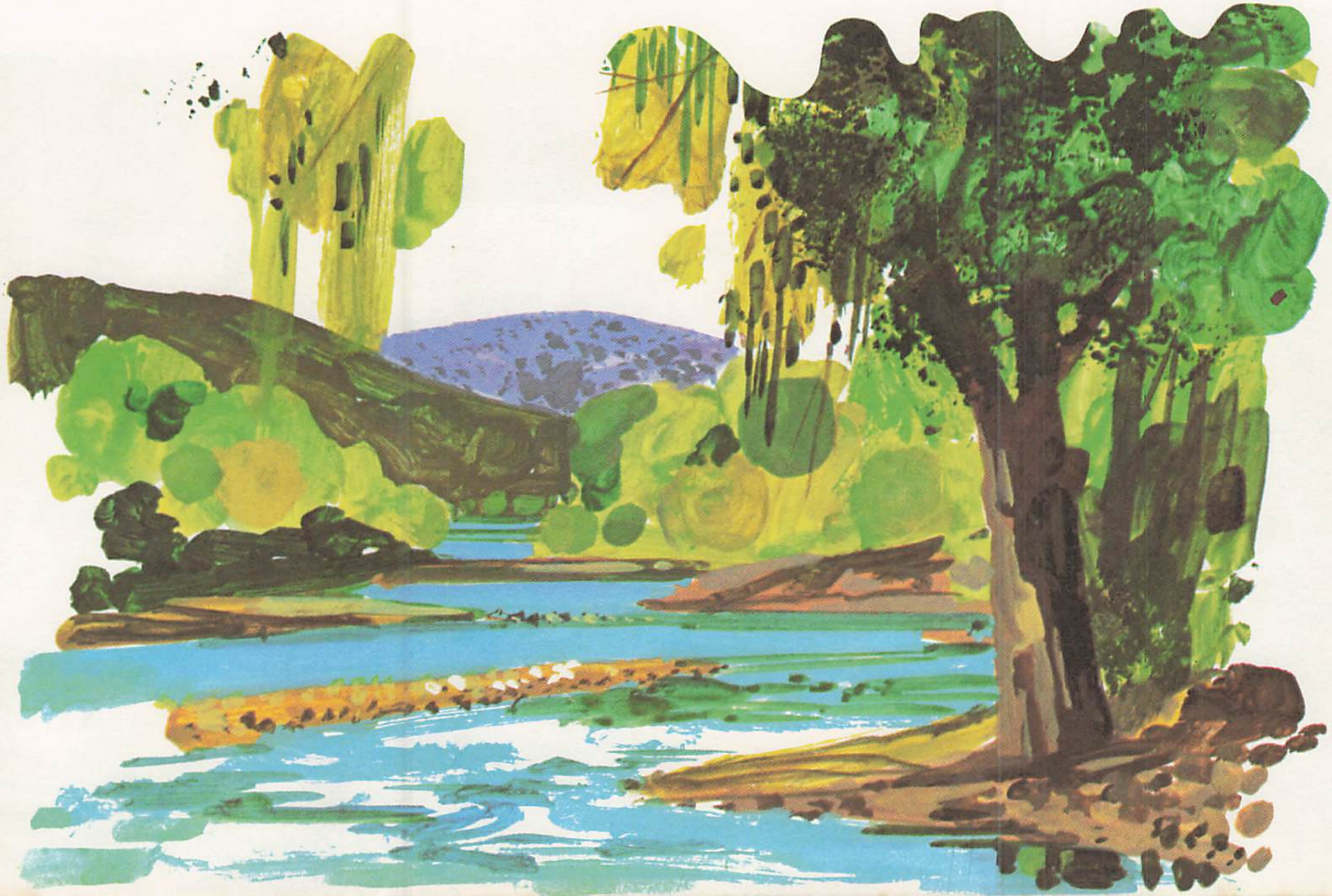


Now the car had stopped, and the people were getting out. The children ran about, exploring. However there was no need to hurry to see everything at once. It was Easter and they could stay here for four days. What a four days they promised to be!

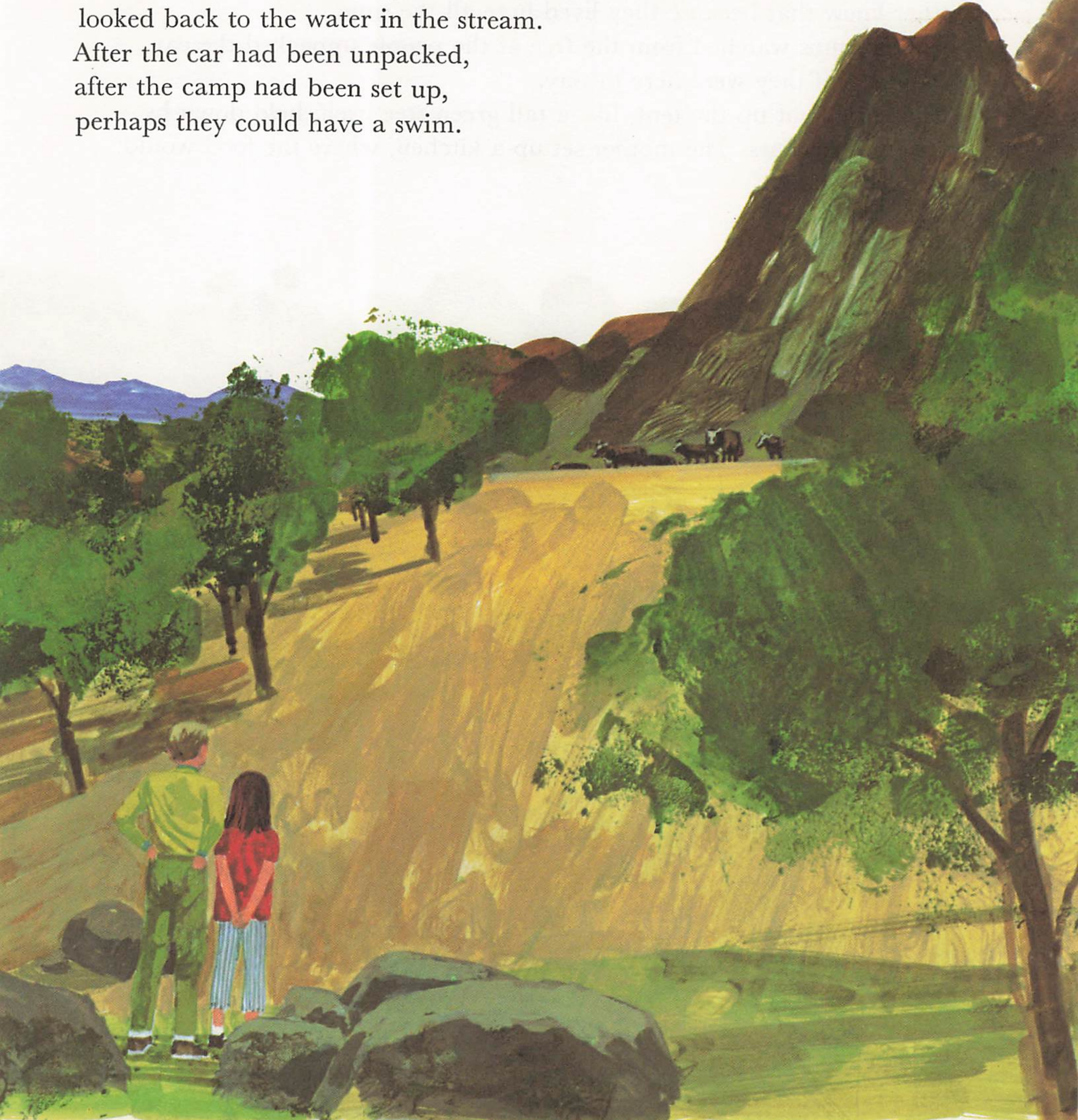
Bobuck's tree was old and wide. It stood on a green patch of ground in the bend of a stream. When you stood under the tree you could hear the water chattering over the river stones.

On the other side, the bank rose to a steep little cliff, and then to green paddocks up above where cows were chewing grass. Above that, towered the mountain.

Tall and craggy, it was part of a mountain range and yet alone. In some parts it was covered with bush, in others there were smooth cliff faces, steep and dangerous. Even from here it looked difficult to climb.



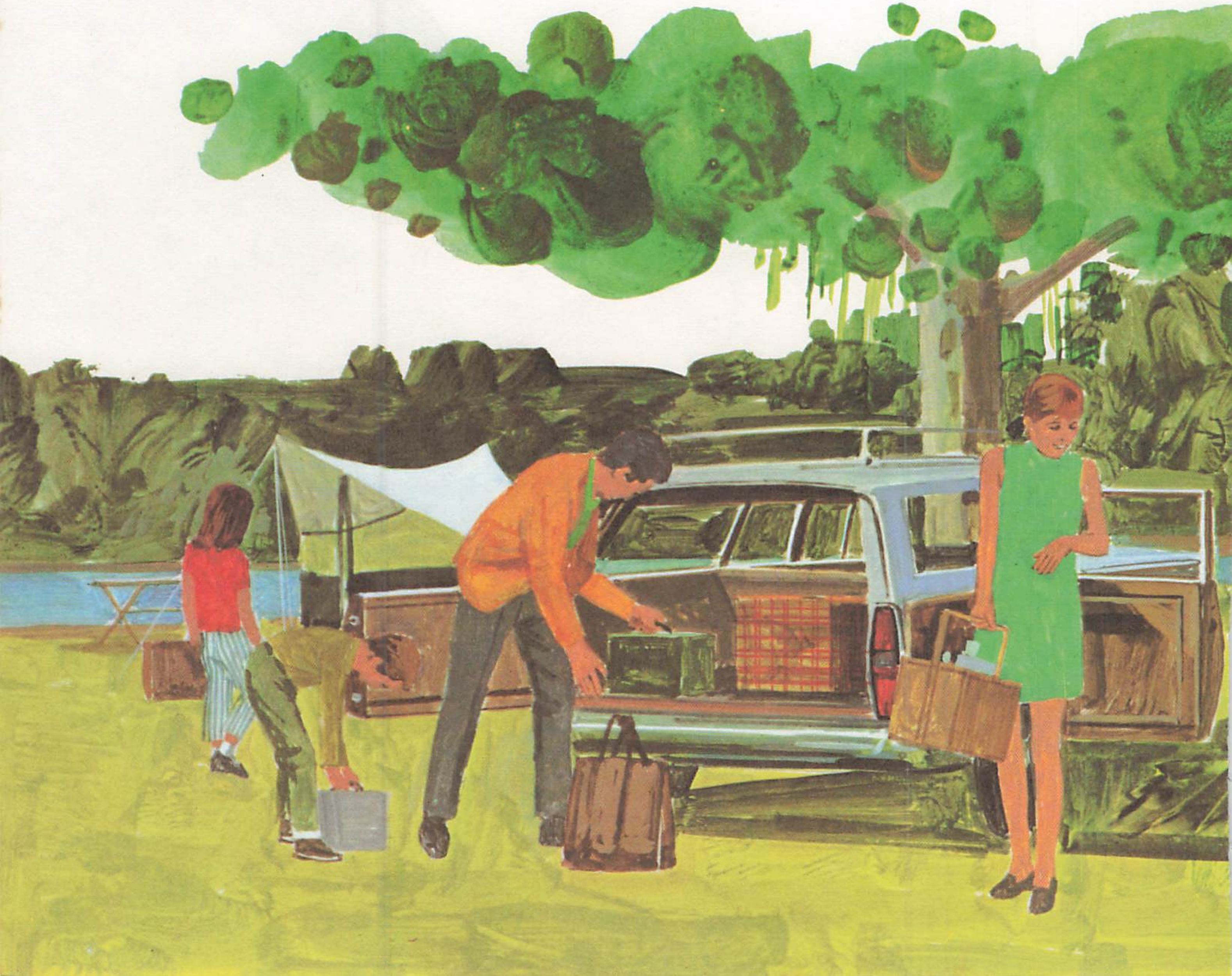
The children turned away from the mountain and
looked back to the water in the stream.
After the car had been unpacked,
after the camp had been set up,
perhaps they could have a swim.



The mountain looked down. It would not go away. Bobuck and his mother knew that because they lived here all the time.

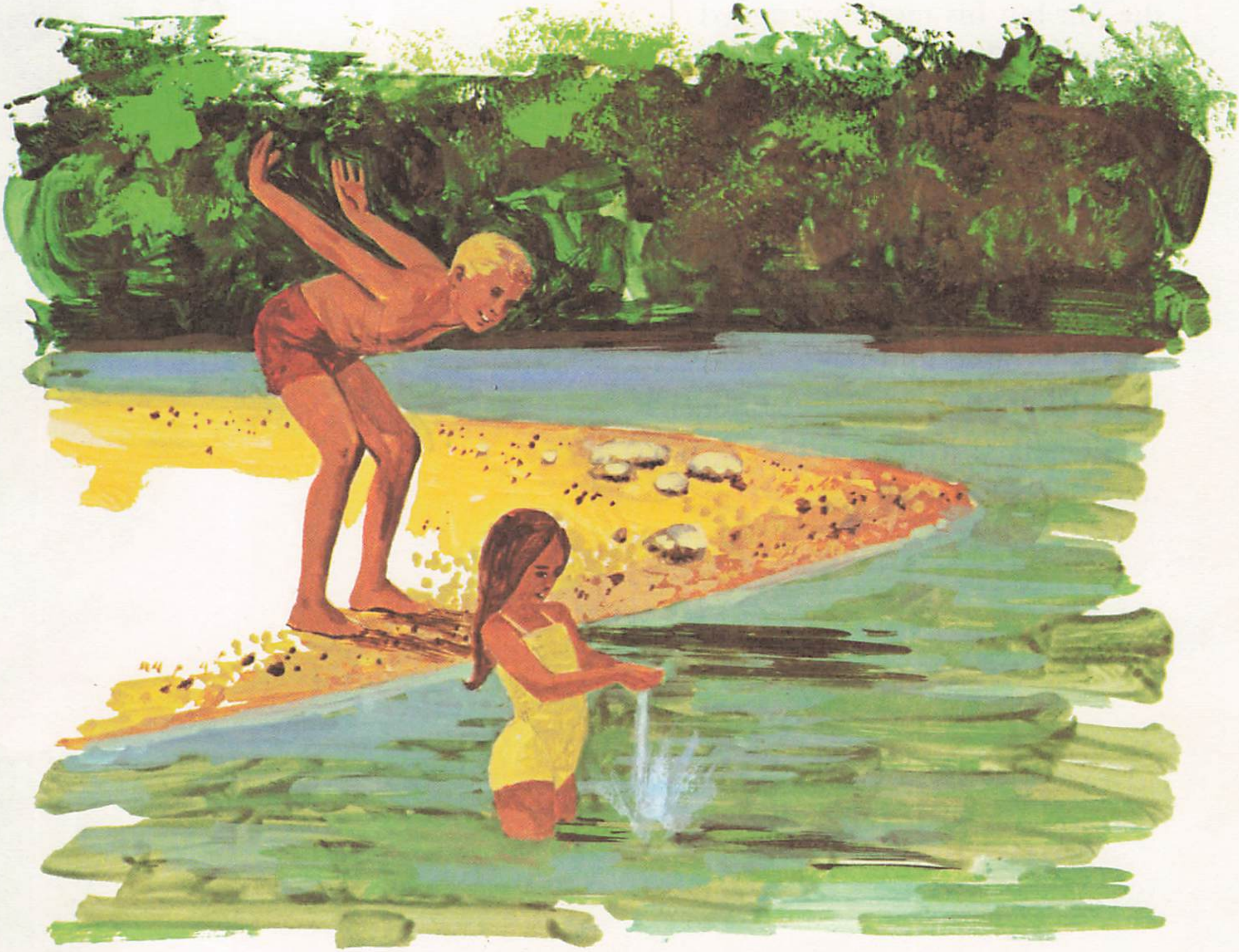
The possums watched from the tree as the people unpacked the car. It looked as if they were here to stay.

The father put up the tent, like a tall green tree itself, held down by ropes and iron bars. The mother set up a kitchen, where the food would be shaded all day.



The children were helping too. They brought pillows and blankets from the car. They unfolded the stretchers and spread out the sleeping bags which were green and soft and warm. It would be cold here in the night.

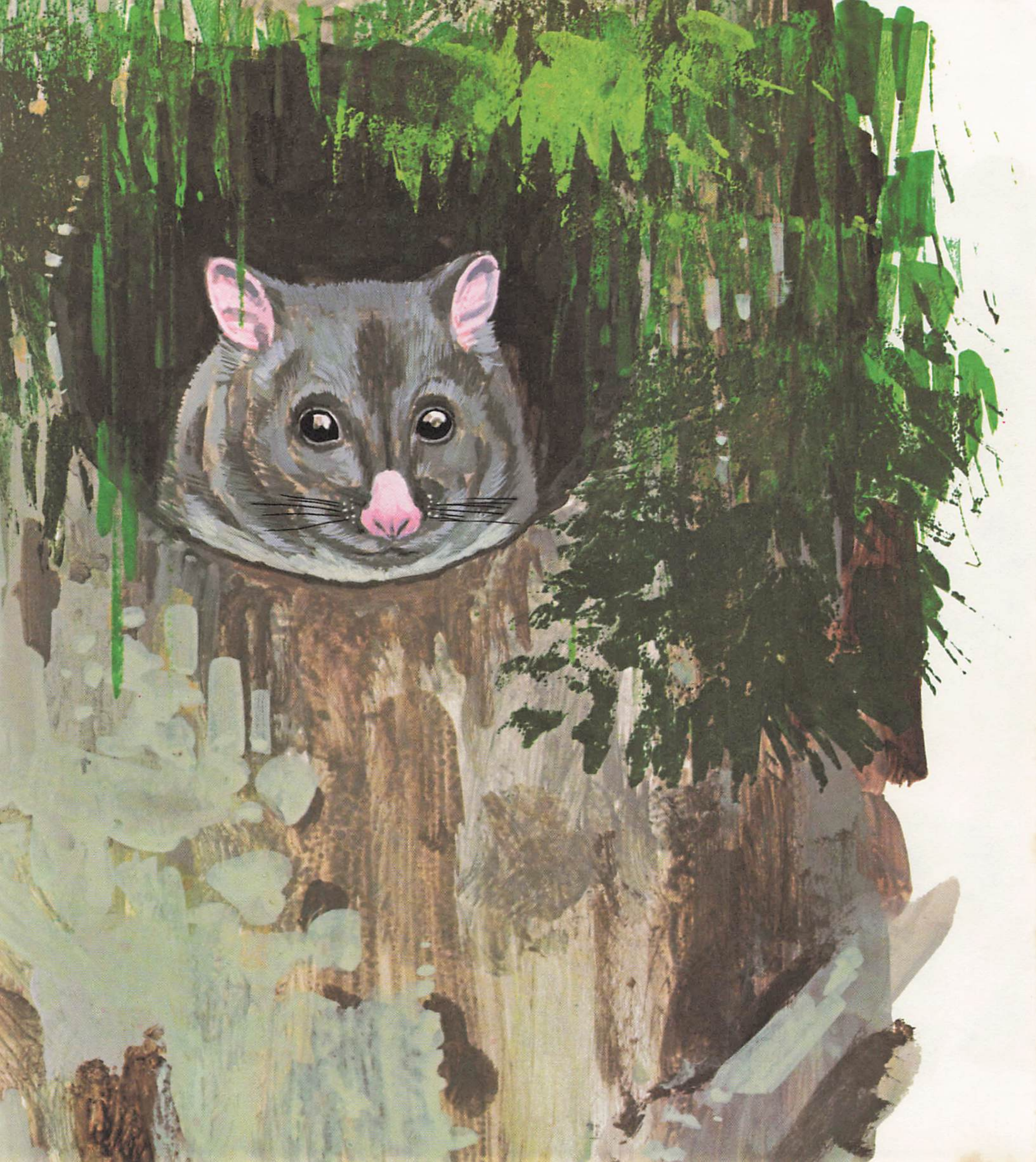
The children almost ran. They were working very fast. They were hoping for a swim.

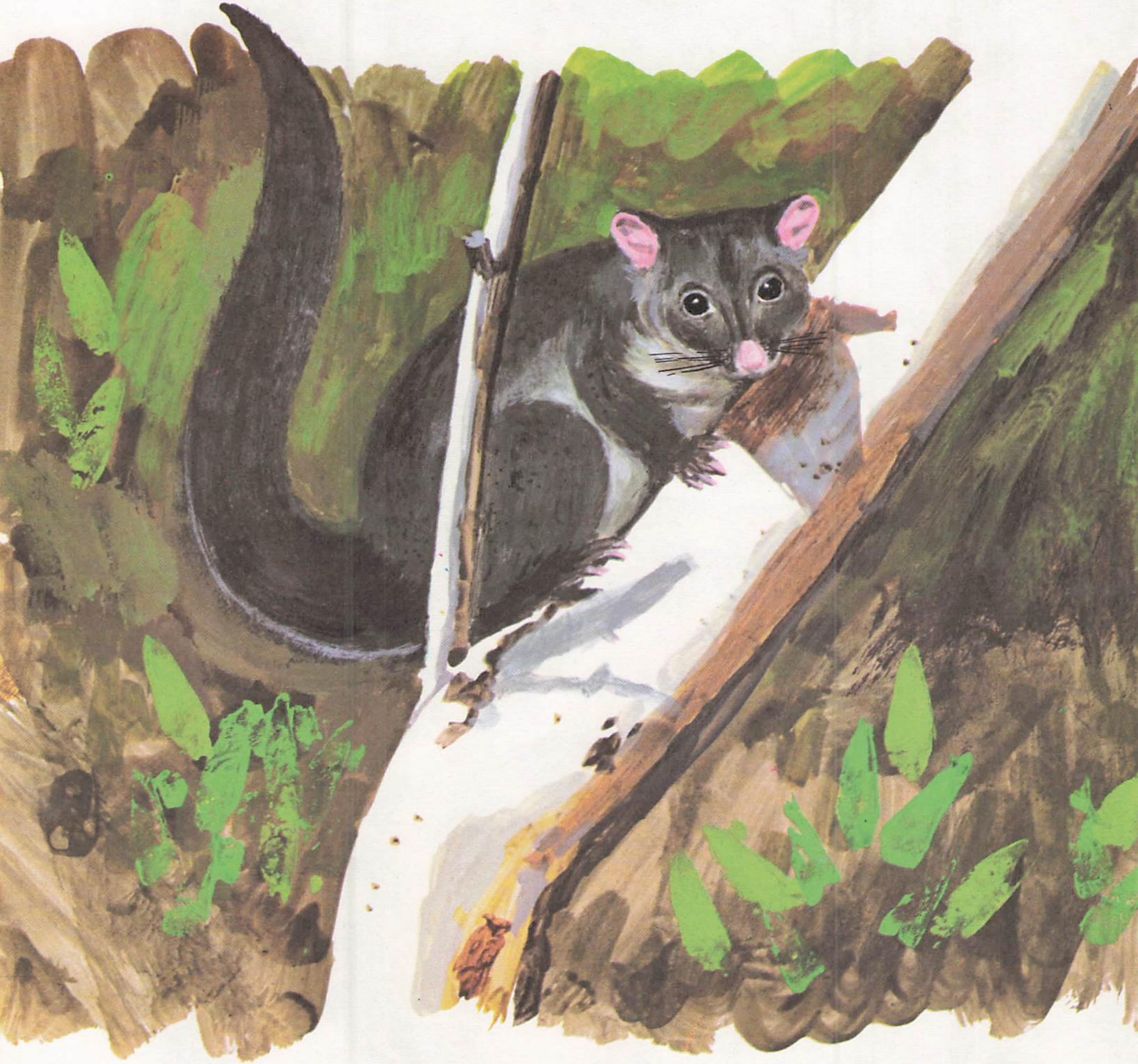


More noise! Bobuck's mother shivered with impatience as the children started splashing in the water. She was feeling cross. At this time of the day possums should be asleep. At night they would come out to hunt. Time enough to see the people then.

Bobuck wanted to stay and see the fun but his mother dragged protesting, back to their home to get on with his sleep.

Bobuck's home was just a hole in the hollow of a tree. It was not very high above the ground, but it was safe enough. Some of Bobuck's family lived right down on the ground and made their homes in hollow logs. But Bobuck's mother liked it best up here and Bobuck liked it too.





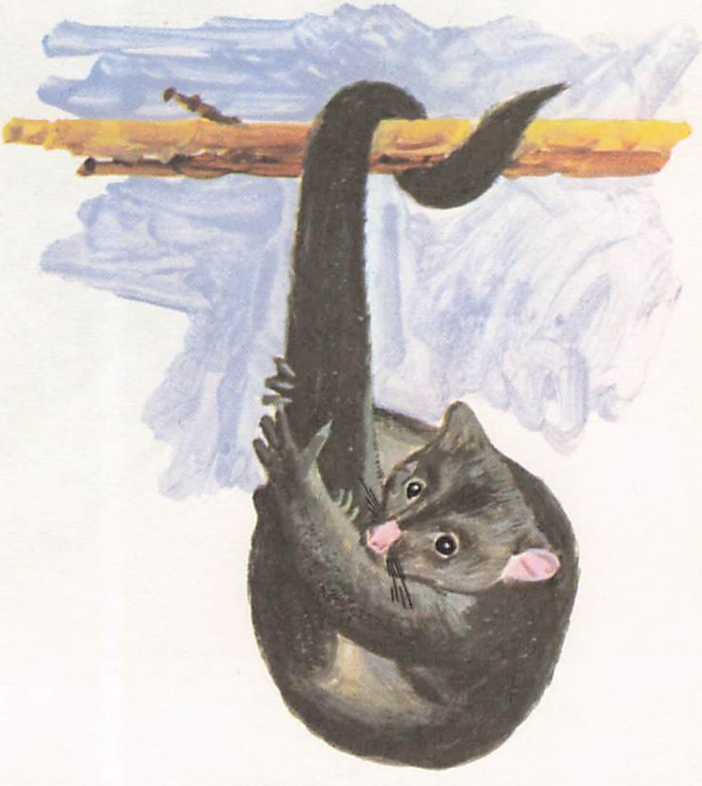
Bobuck didn't know that he belonged to a special family of possums, who live in the mountains of Eastern Australia. He had shorter, rounder ears than other possums and a slightly longer nose. His eyes were large and round and very black, and when it was dark they gleamed in the night.

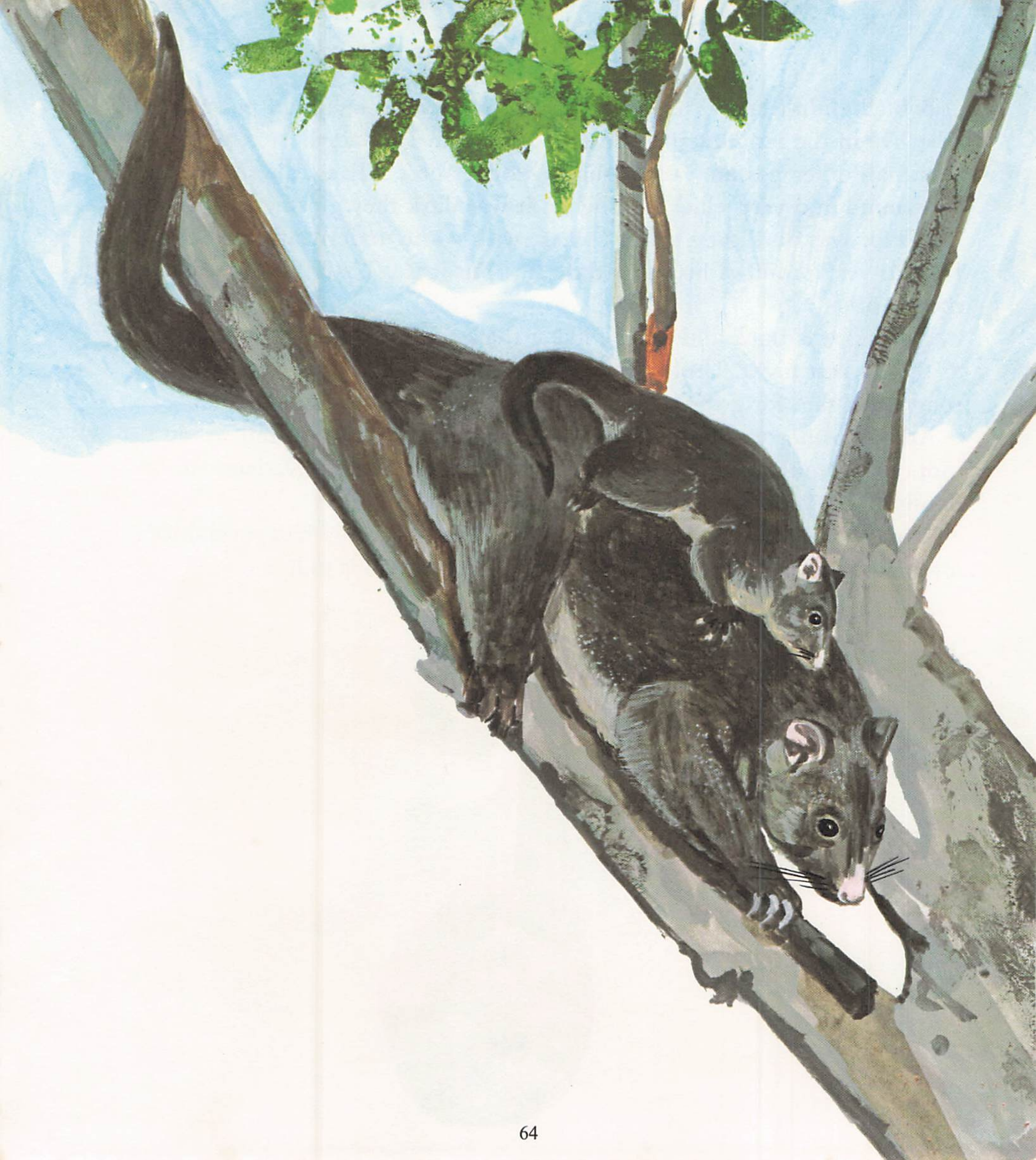
His fur was dark grey, nearly black, with white underneath his body. He was very proud of his shiny dark fur, but it was his tail that was his special pride.

The tail was thick and bushy, like a thick soft brush and it was as black as the darkest night. Under the tail was a part that had no fur, with roughened skin for gripping bark when its owner was climbing trees.

And its owner was to find, many times in his life, that his tail would get him out of trouble, for it was like a fifth leg. And having five legs can be handy when you climb on slippery bark.

The other four legs were well made for climbing; they had special toes for gripping bark. But they were not as beautiful as his tail.

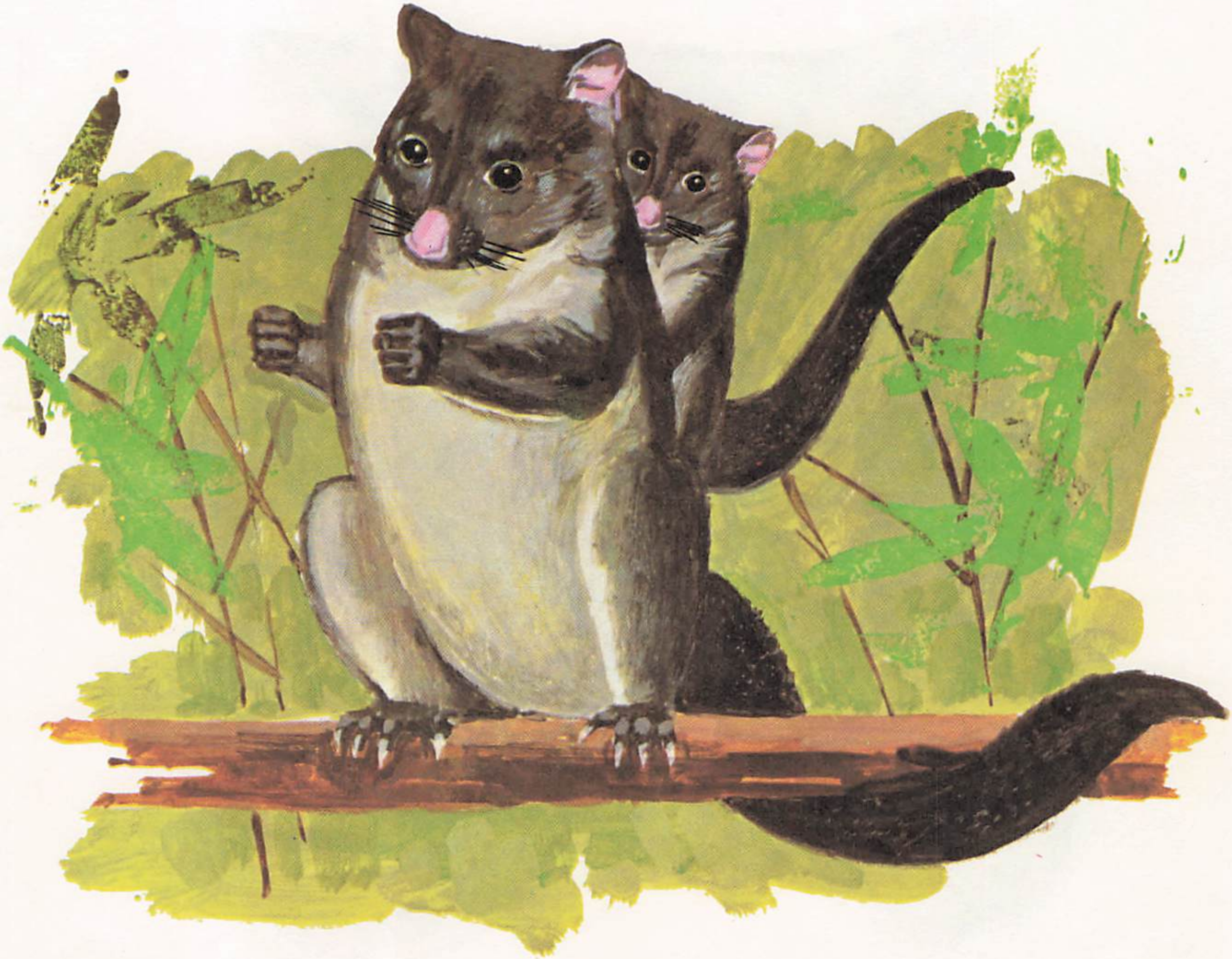




One day, Bobuck would run along the boughs as swiftly as his mother. He knew that he was still young. When they went long distances on their nightly hunt he would ride perched on her back like a jockey.

At night when they came down the tree Bobuck held on enjoying the ride as his mother pointed straight down to the ground. He was used to holding on and was not afraid.

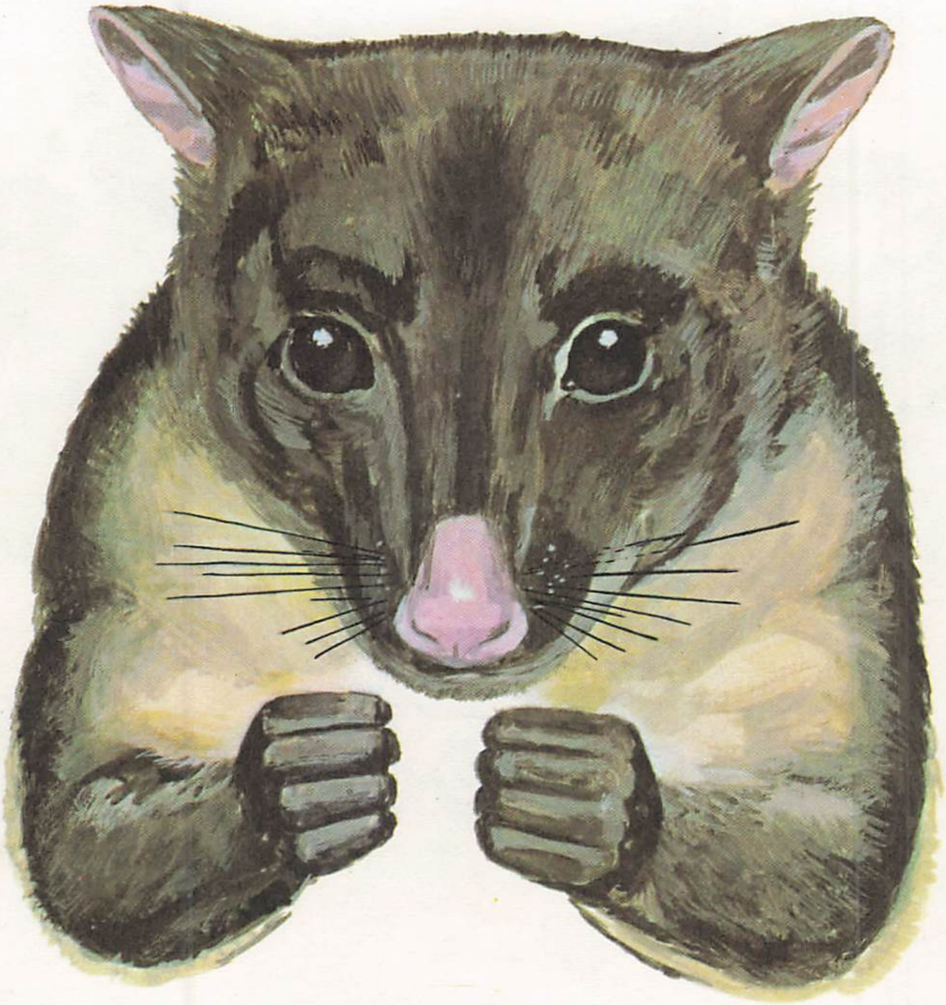
If they heard a noise, which meant that danger might be near, his mother would stand up suddenly and Bobuck would almost fall right off!



She would stand up on her back legs, front paws held up and ready to fight. Her black eyes would glare a warning and her voice ring out her special fighting call: 'Uh-uh-uh!', like breathy fighting grunts.

Bobuck would hold on tight and stand up on her back so that he too could glare with black eyes and try to make the fighting call. 'Uh————uh ————u—h!' But it would come out only as a whisper and frighten nothing at all.

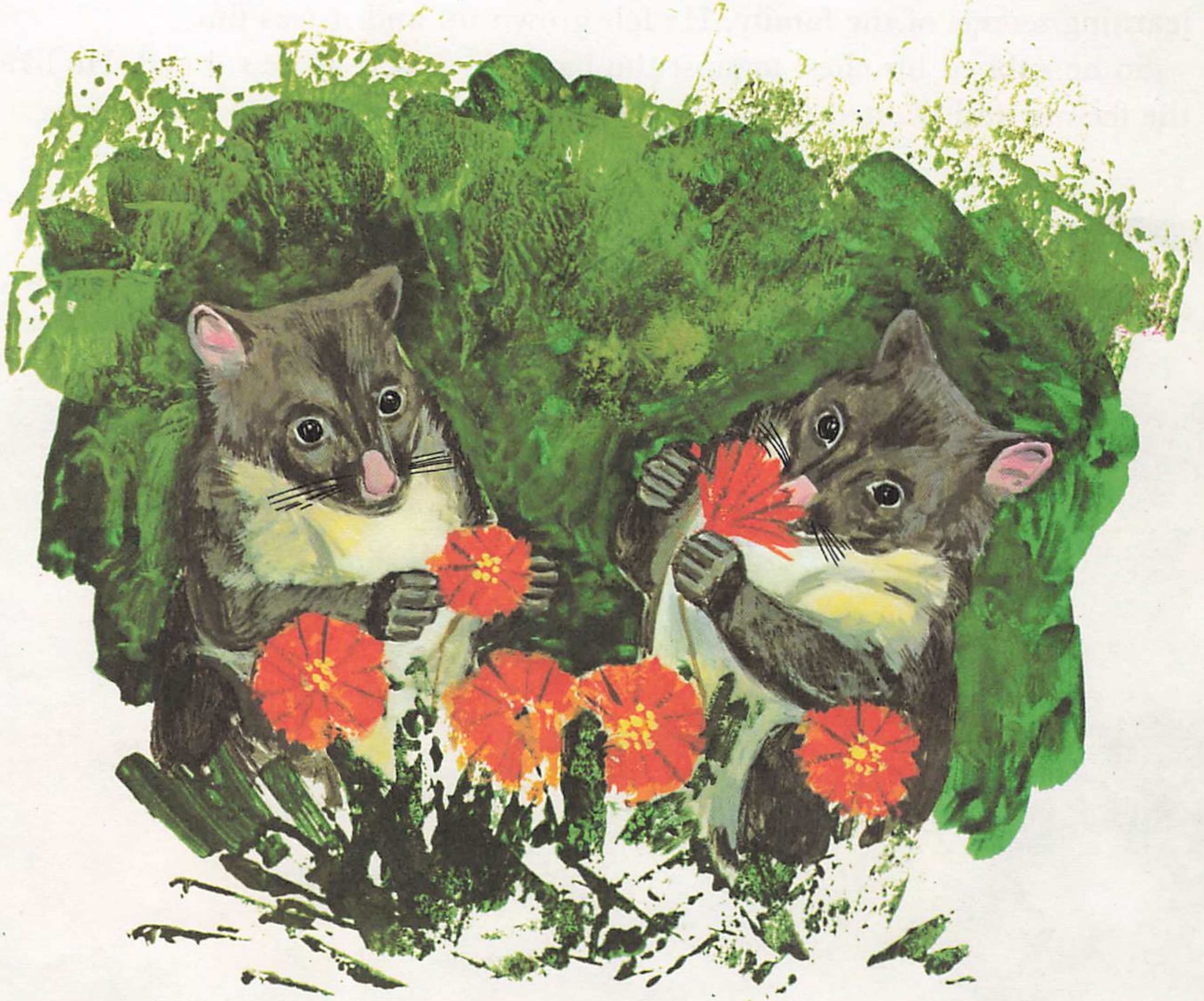
One day he would make the loudest Bobuck call the bush had ever heard and frighten everyone!



Bobuck remembered when he was very small and lived all the time in his mother's pouch. For six weeks he had lived there, going with her wherever she went, until his body was covered in fur and he was strong enough to walk about. Very hard it had been, at first, just walking about on the boughs of the tree.

Now he was older, he could ride at times and sometimes climb down to hunt for himself.

At night, down on the ground, the possums looked for fern fronds, tiny leaves of new young plants, insects, nectar from flowering trees and any fruit that they could find.



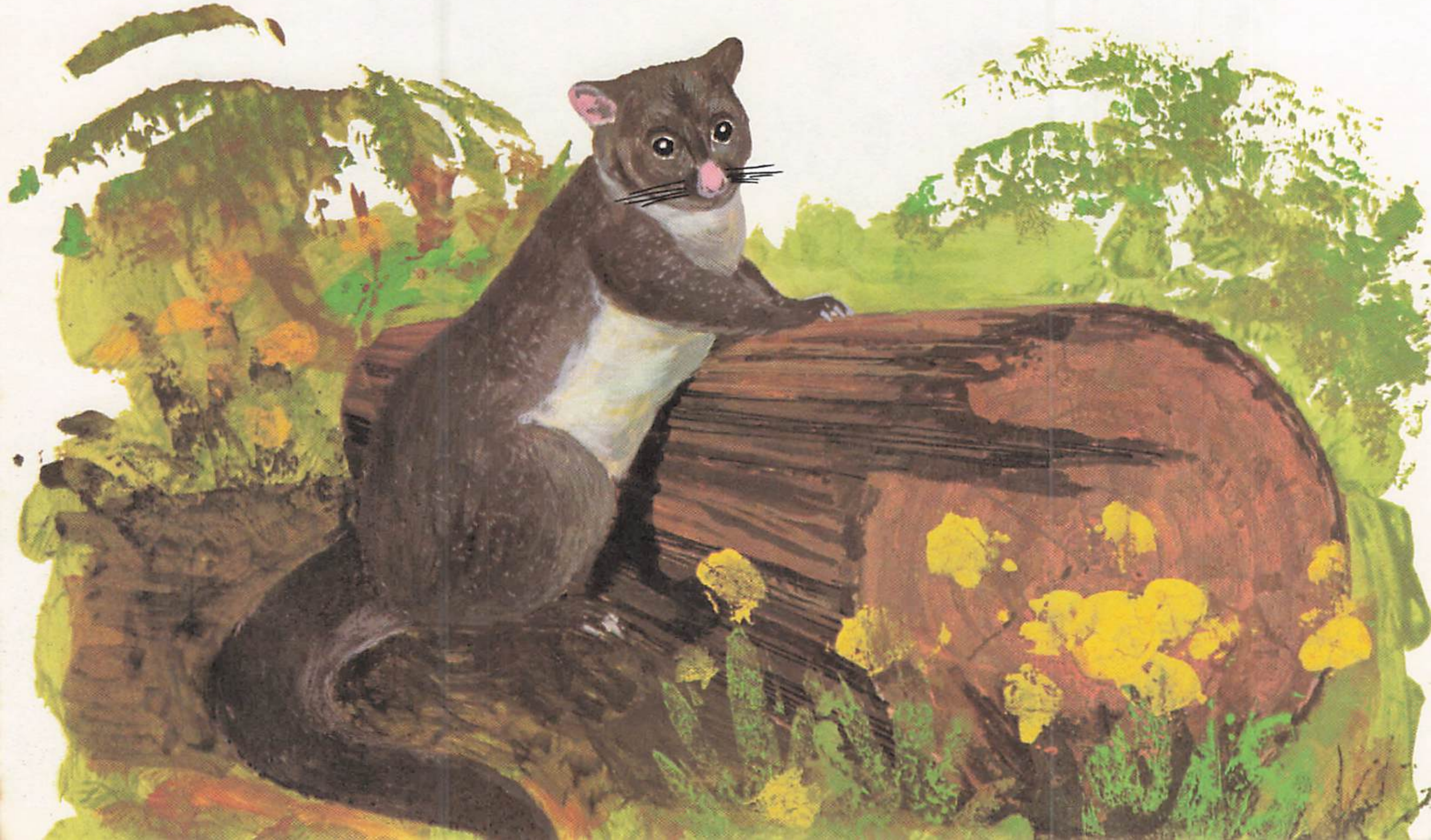
While they were hunting Bobuck discovered that as a mountain possum, there was a special lesson he had to learn.

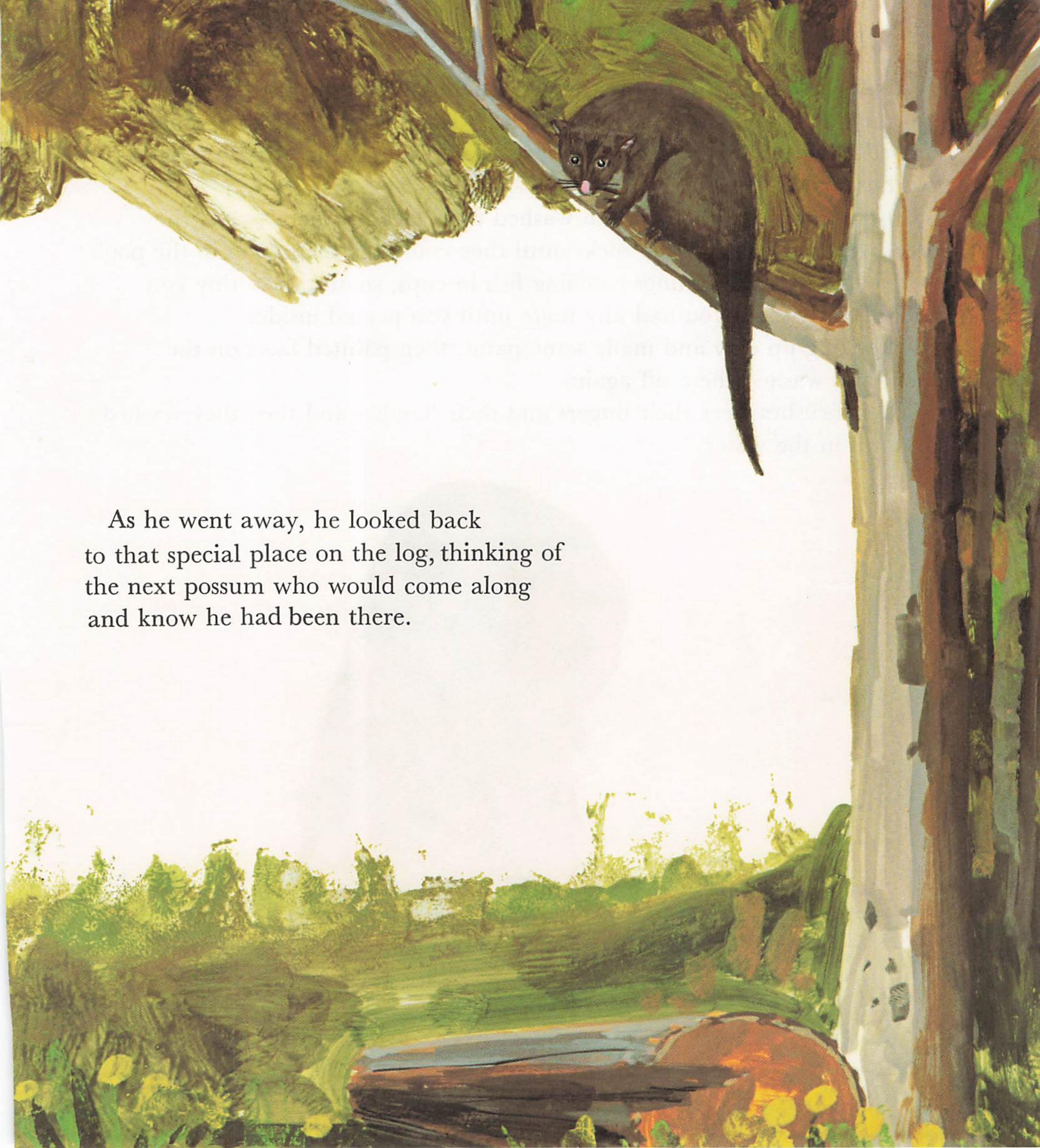
Sometimes, as she passed a fallen log, Bobuck's mother would stop, and sniff the air then rub her furry chest against the rough bark of the log. Bobuck would wonder why.

'This is a message to members of our family,' his mother said. 'I rub my fur against the log, and leave our special smell behind. The next mountain possum who comes along will know that we have been rubbing here and he will rub in the same spot.'

'Can I really do it too?' Bobuck's whiskers twitched. Now he was learning secrets of the family. He felt grown up and it was fun.

So he rubbed his chest against the bark; it tickled as he rubbed. He liked the feeling and wanted to stay, but his mother called him to come along.





As he went away, he looked back to that special place on the log, thinking of the next possum who would come along and know he had been there.

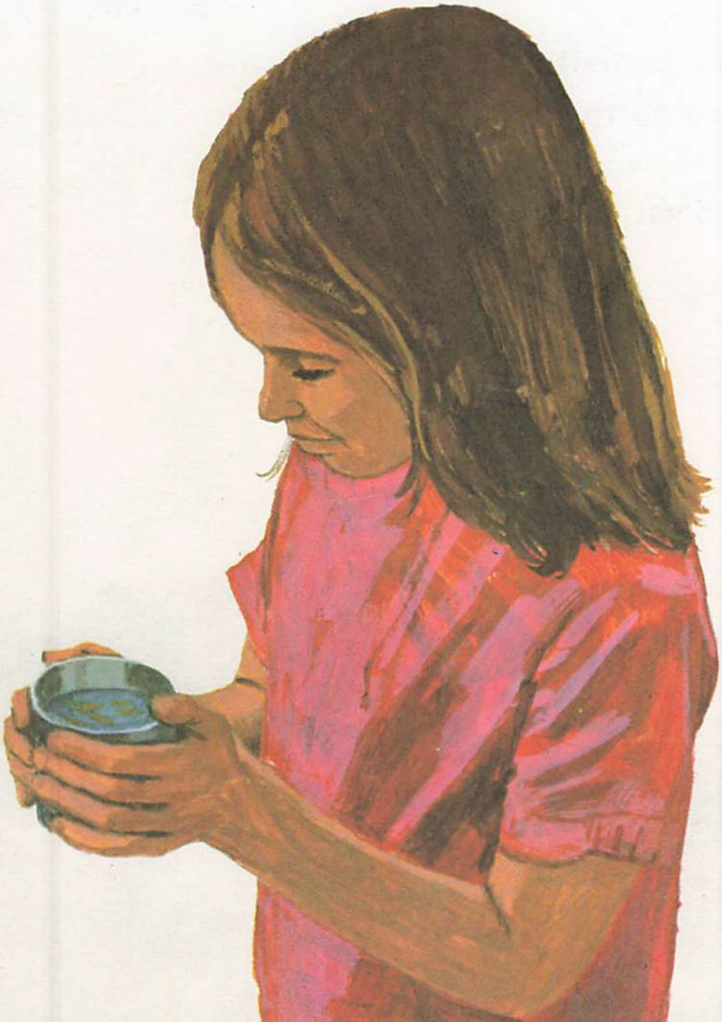
The people underneath the tree were living happily in their tent. Every morning they woke up early, much earlier than they did at home and moved about finding wood for the fire and cooking their breakfast on red-hot coals.

In the mornings, the children washed their faces in the water of the creek, leaning out over the rocks until they could see their faces in the pool.

They spent the mornings catching fish in cups, small fish so tiny you could hardly see if you had any there until you peered inside.

They dug up clay and made some paint, then painted faces on the rocks and washed them off again.

Their brushes were their fingers and their hands—and then they washed it all off in the water.

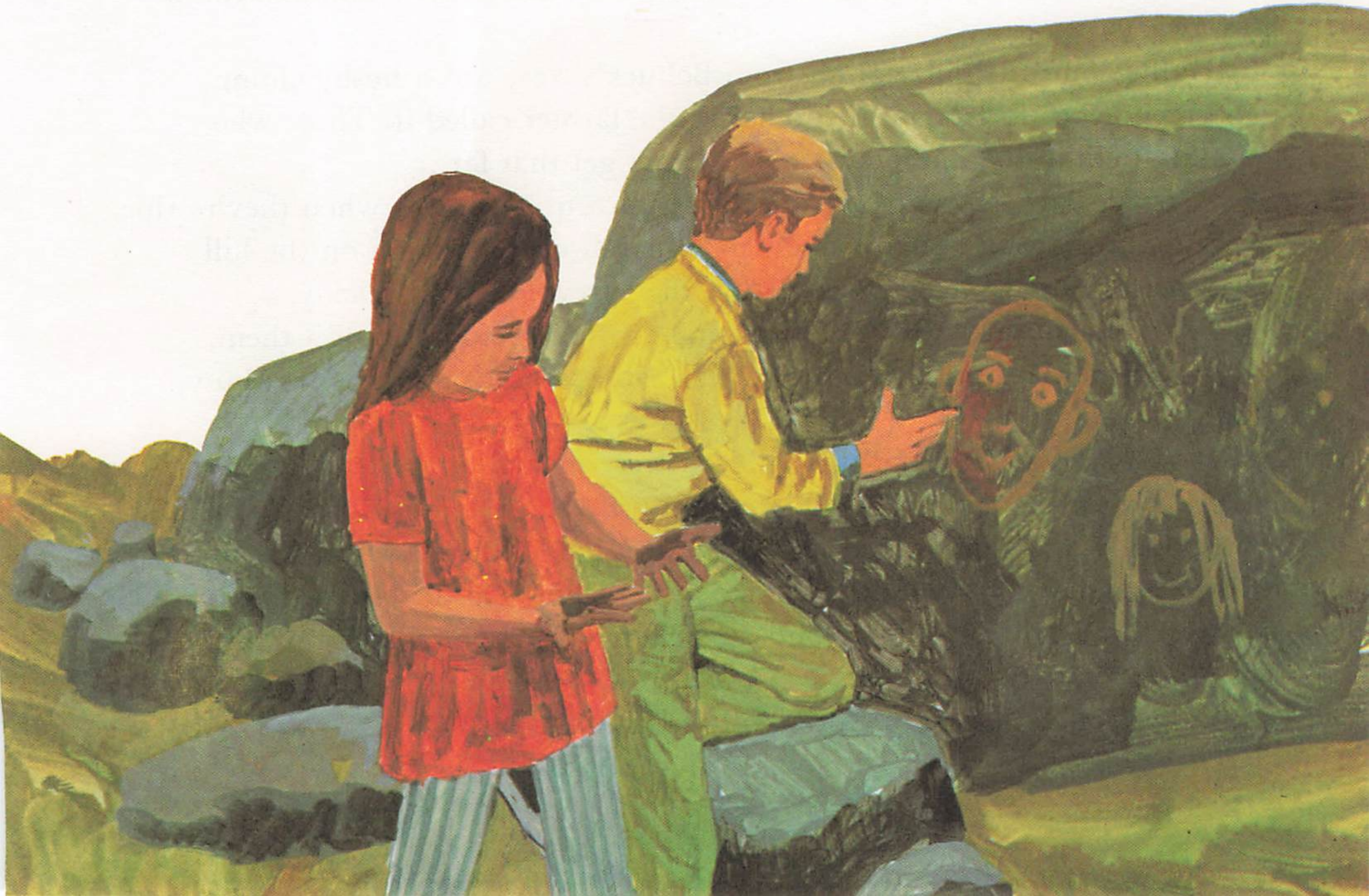


Then after lunch they climbed the tree. They climbed well, but not as well as possums.

At night, while the billy boiled, they sat around the fire and sang—every song they'd ever heard, while the father played an old guitar. The boys played tunes on gum leaves and the girls hit saucepan lids together.

The possums thought it was a terrible noise and left the tree to go and hunt.

So life went on, very little changed, while the campers lived beneath the tree. The possums were used to campers here, for this was a favourite beauty spot.



The land was owned by a farmer who didn't mind the campers coming in so long as they kept the camping ground clean and were kind to the animals on his farm.

Hikers liked to come here often because there were so many things to do. You could climb up cliffs, or follow winding cattle tracks, or follow the creek along its course, or just lie down and watch the cows or spend long hours swimming in the creek.

You could follow the creek downstream, or up, rock-hopping over river stones, finding a new deep pool at every turn and trying its cool waters with your toes.

Climbers liked to come here too, because of the high mountain. Every weekend they went off with packs and climbed up there, up to the top, then came back saying they had seen the sea, and farms a hundred miles away.

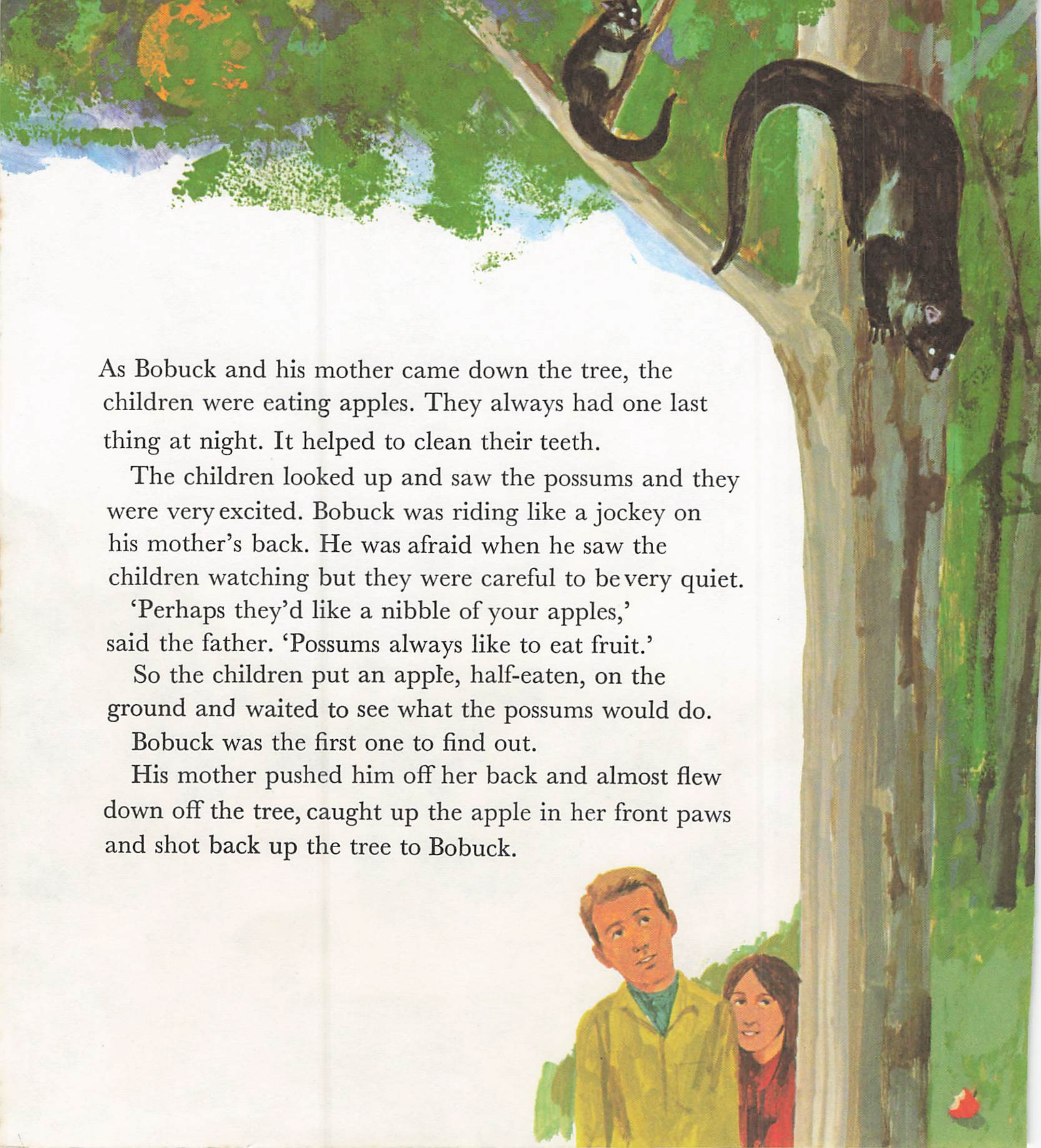
Halfway up the hill, not far from Bobuck's tree, was a bushy clump of green avocado trees—'the orchard', the farmer called it. Those who couldn't climb the mountain could always get that far.

Avocados are large green fruit, which turn quite purple when they're ripe. The flesh is soft and yellowish green. The soil up there high on the hill was perfect for the avocado trees and they grew lush and thickly.

Bobuck's cousins lived up there. One day he would go to visit them, but now the days were taken up with sleeping and at night he was busy, just looking for food.

It was late evening and the children were sitting by the fire. At Easter there is a full moon and the children had stayed up to watch it. The night was cloudy and they waited in the dark by the light of the fire. But now the moon was showing itself at last. Like a big yellow ball it rose in the sky, hiding a moment behind a cloud, and then flashed out at them, round and full.

'Now, you've seen it, children, off to bed.'



As Bobuck and his mother came down the tree, the children were eating apples. They always had one last thing at night. It helped to clean their teeth.

The children looked up and saw the possums and they were very excited. Bobuck was riding like a jockey on his mother's back. He was afraid when he saw the children watching but they were careful to be very quiet.

'Perhaps they'd like a nibble of your apples,' said the father. 'Possums always like to eat fruit.'

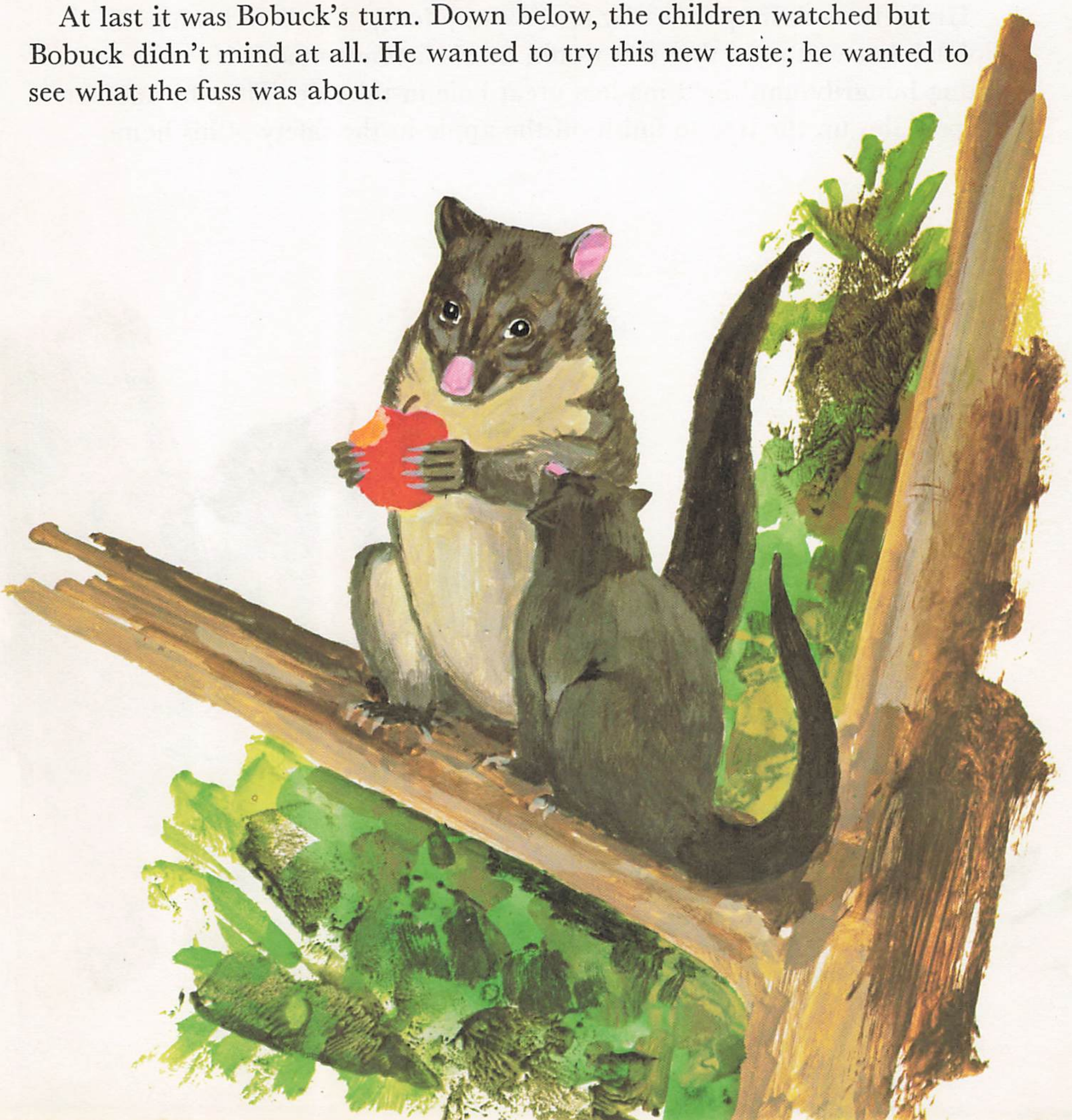
So the children put an apple, half-eaten, on the ground and waited to see what the possums would do.

Bobuck was the first one to find out.

His mother pushed him off her back and almost flew down off the tree, caught up the apple in her front paws and shot back up the tree to Bobuck.

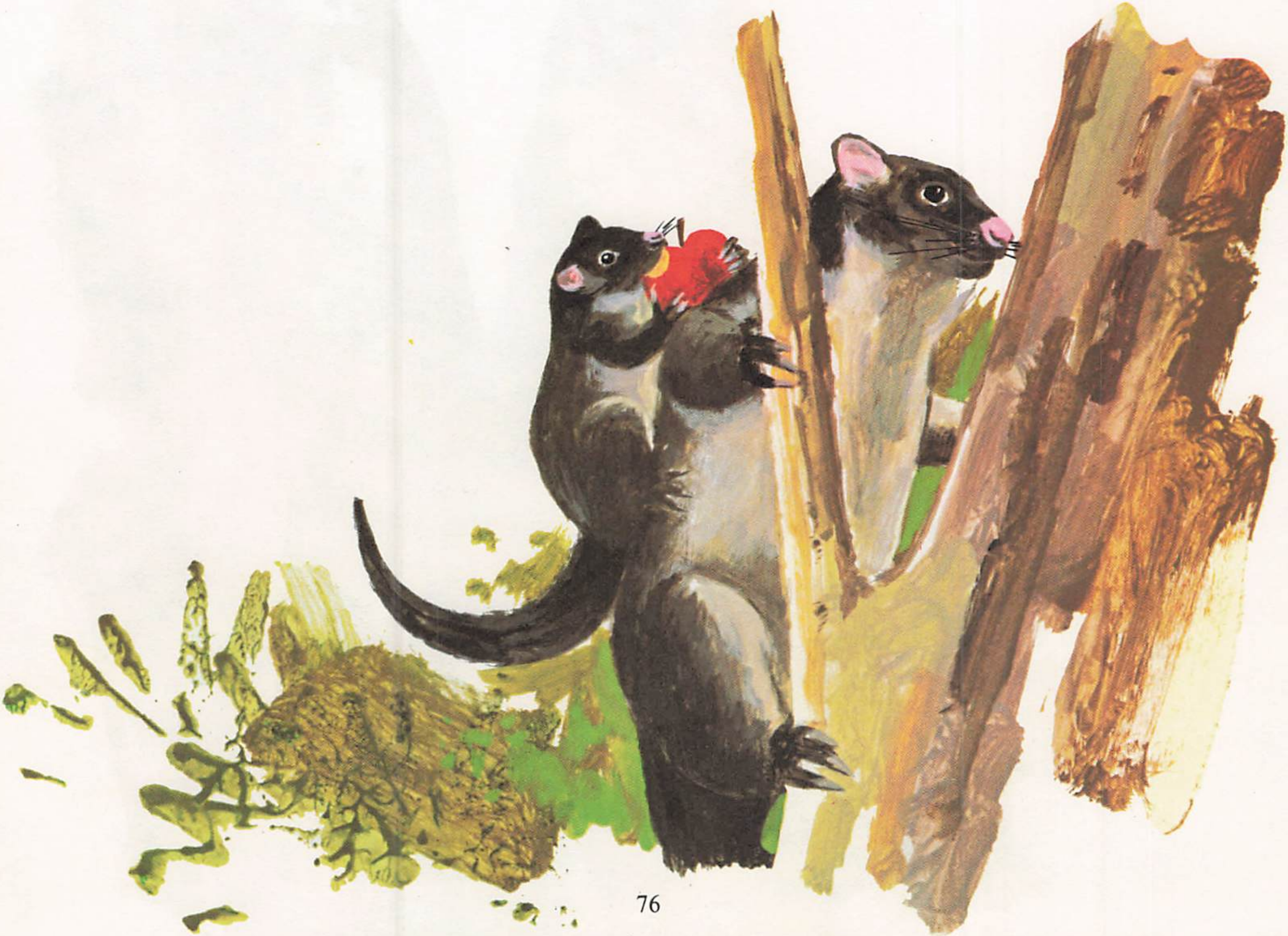
Then she sat beside him on the branch and showed him how this good thing could be eaten. The little possum could hardly wait to see what it was like.

At last it was Bobuck's turn. Down below, the children watched but Bobuck didn't mind at all. He wanted to try this new taste; he wanted to see what the fuss was about.



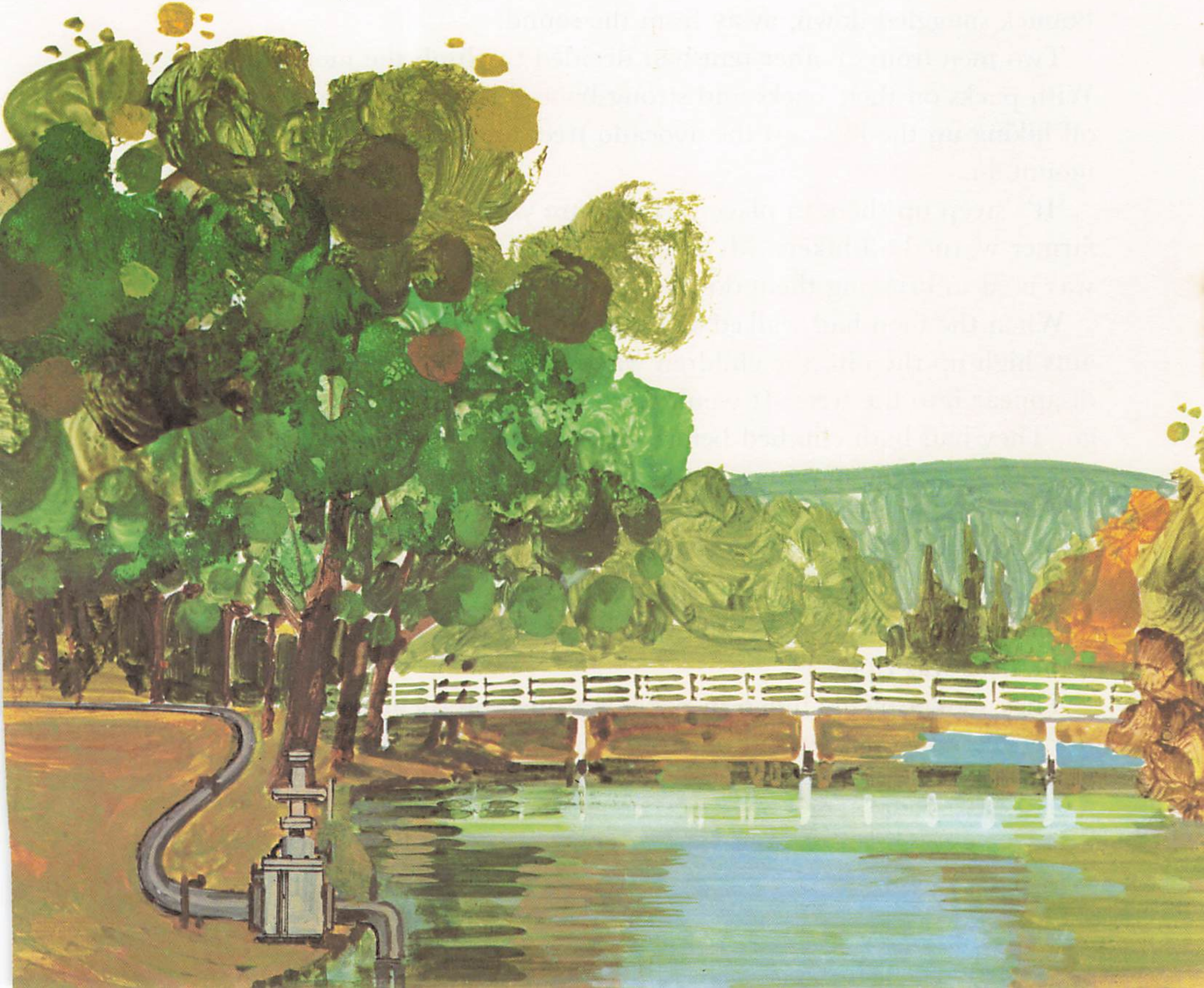
His mother brought the fruit along the branch and handed it to him to hold between his paws. It was heavier than he'd expected, but he held it tightly and bit into the white flesh.

His teeth sank in quite easily and sweet juice gathered in his mouth. Bobuck knew at once that this would be his favourite food. He went on biting hungrily until he'd made a great hole in the side. Then his mother helped him up the tree to finish off the apple in the safety of his home.



In the morning his mother was snoring in the mountain-possum way when Bobuck woke up at a sudden sound.

There was one sound he was well used to—the steady beating of a pump a little further down the creek. There was a bridge that crossed the creek, leading up to the farmer's house and by the bridge was a black machine. The pump. It made a noise when the farmer turned it on to pump the water up to his crops.



The pump had been there when Bobuck was born and he was quite used to hearing the sound; it was a normal part of the farm.

For just a few hours every day the pump would beat: 'bop-bop-bop-bop,' until the farmer turned it off and all was peaceful once again.

However it was not the sound of the pump that Bobuck was hearing now. Two men were going off to climb the mountain and everyone else was waving goodbye. The children were calling in high-pitched voices and Bobuck snuggled down, away from the sound.

Two men from another tent had decided to climb the mountain. With packs on their backs and strong boots on their feet, they were going off hiking up the hill past the avocado trees and on towards the mountain.

'It's steep up there in places. Make sure you wear strong boots', the farmer warned all hikers. Men had been lost up there before today. He was used to bringing them down.

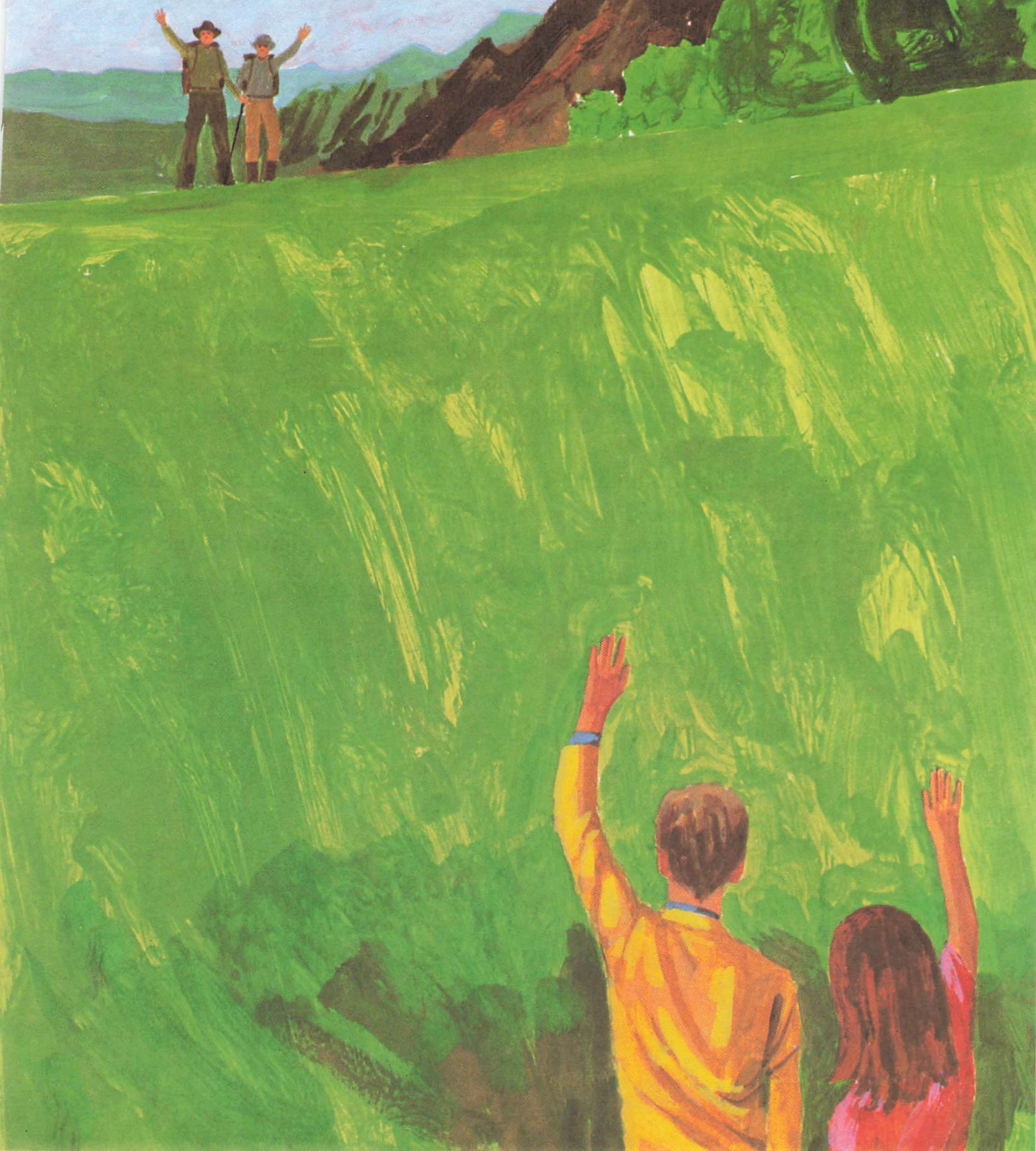
When the men had walked so far away that they were only specks like ants high up the hill, the children waved goodbye again, and watched them disappear into the trees. It would be a long climb, but they knew where to go. They had both climbed before, and their boots were strong.

'Let's climb the mountain too,' decided the boys as soon as they'd gone.

'But we're not allowed to, we'd never get there,' the girls were much more cautious.

'Silly—I didn't mean the mountain really—just the hill.' And that was a different matter. They were allowed to go as far as the orchard to see if the fruit was ripe.

They took a picnic lunch in packs strapped on their backs, and crossed the creek, and then walked on straight up the hill, getting slower as they climbed.



Halfway, they stopped beneath a tree to rest in a small patch of shade on the sunny hill and looked down at the camp.

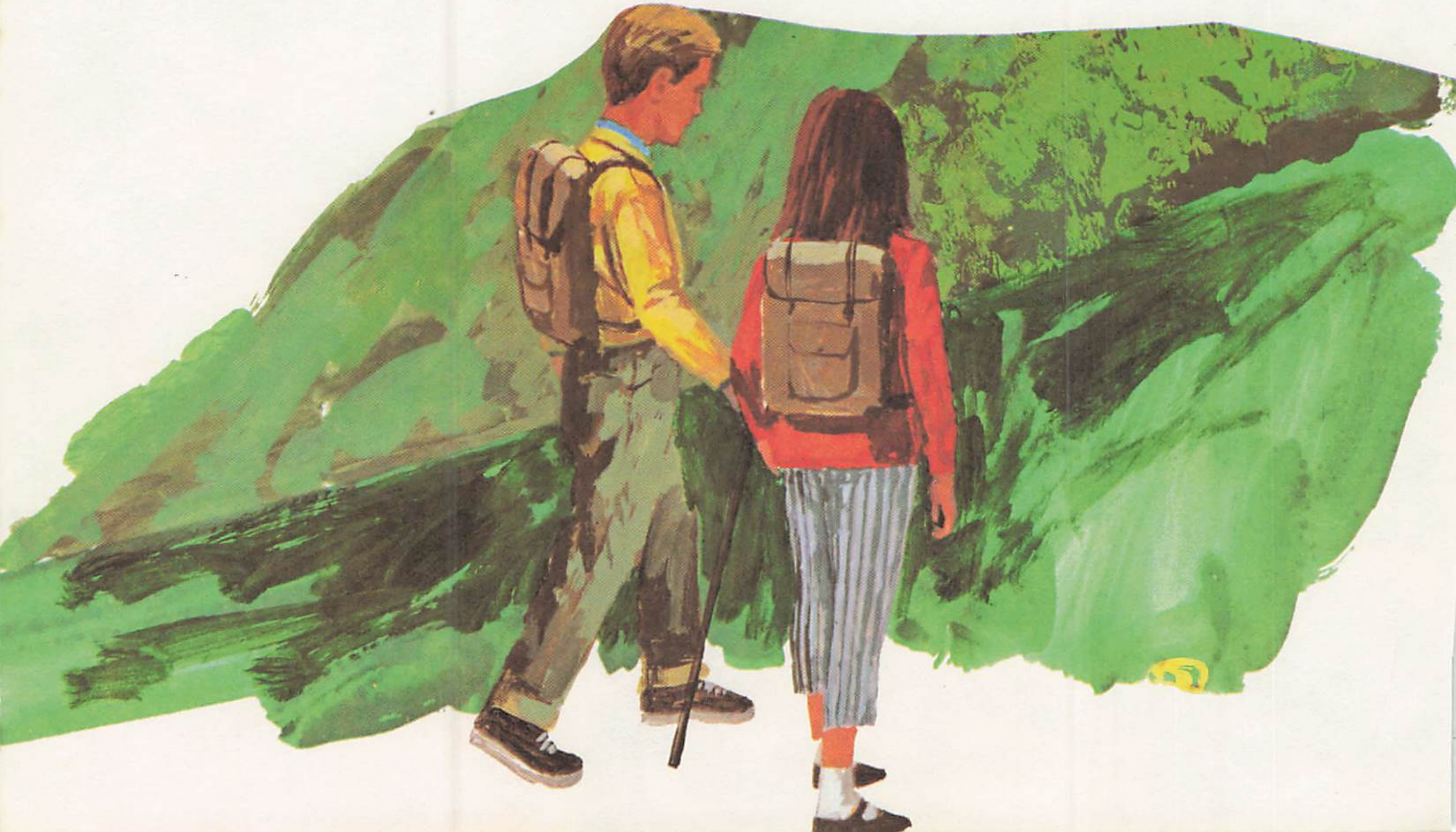
'Look! I can see our tree!' Inside it, Bobuck was asleep.

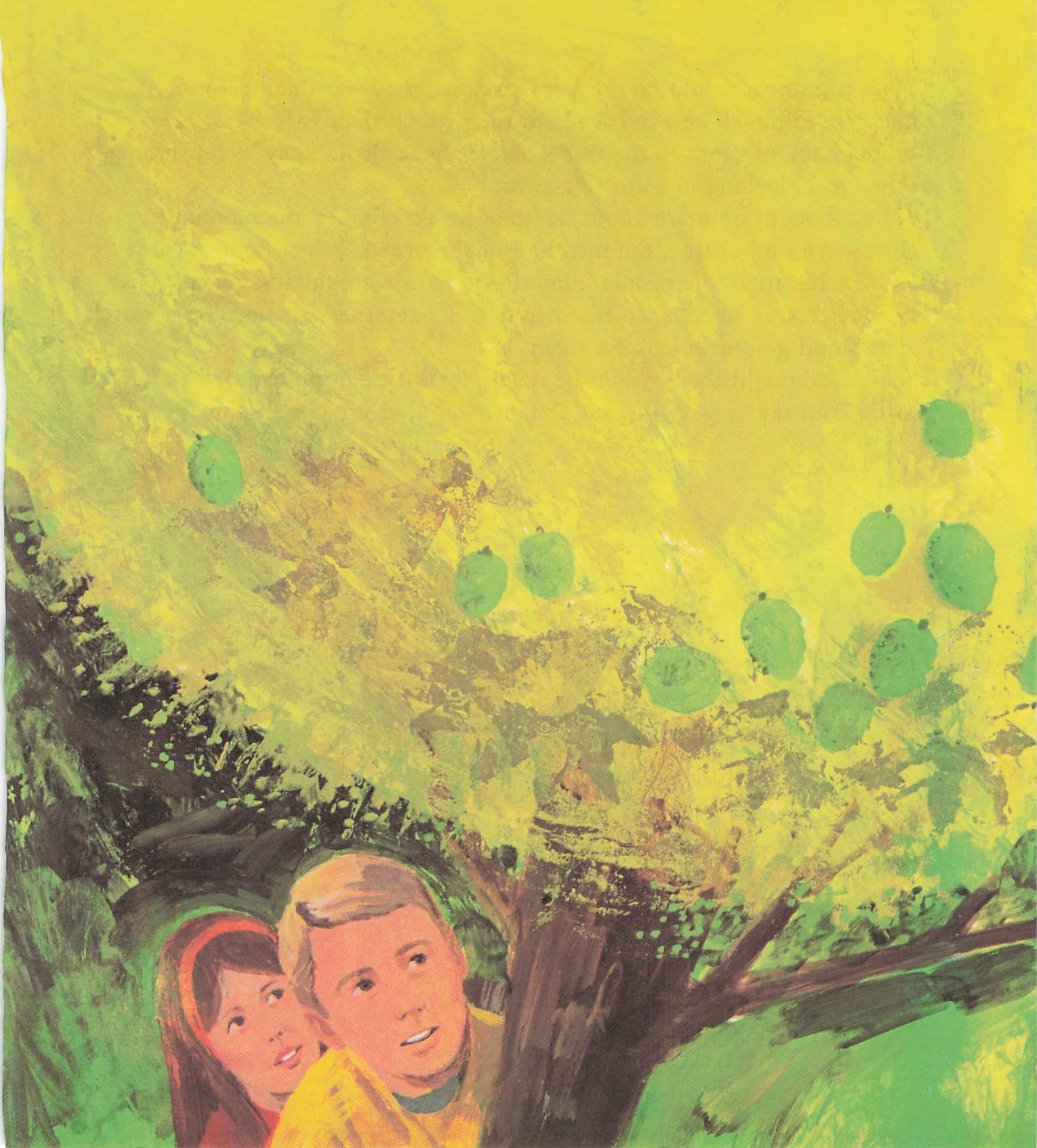
It was a long way up to the orchard, much further than it had looked and it was hot work climbing, far away from the water of the creek. Because they had decided to reach the trees they pulled their bodies on up the hill. The trees grew closer every moment, so they kept on going upward, hauling themselves against the slope although they longed to rest.

At last—the avocado trees. They stopped and suddenly didn't feel so tired as they peered at the trees to look for the fruit.

All green—no, none ripe yet. They'd tell the farmer when they went down.

They had their picnic lunch on the grass and then decided to go back. Down there, the tree looked far away and small and the creek was just a line of green where bushes grew along the banks and water glinted in the sun.



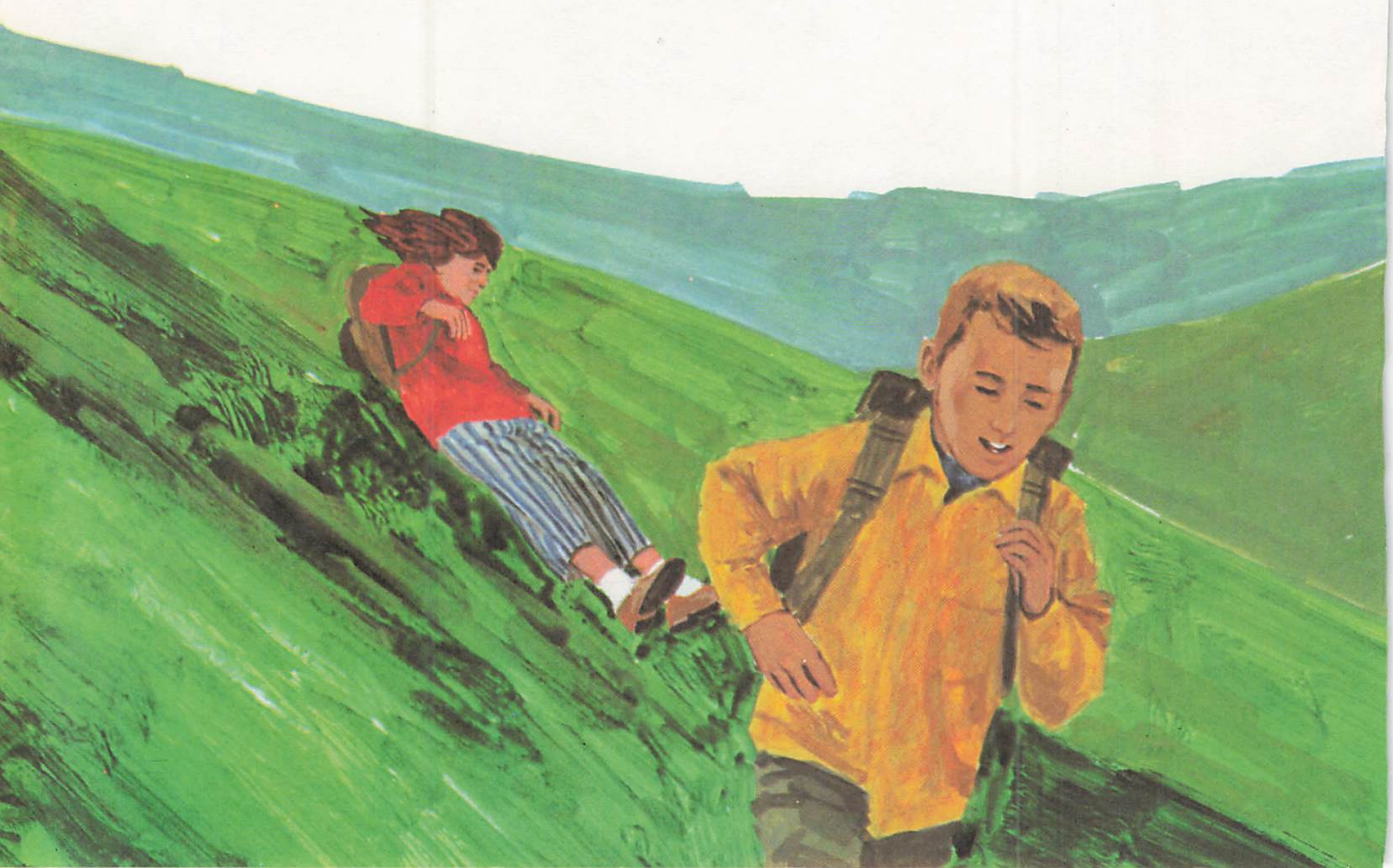


The trip down would be quicker—so down they went half-running, sometimes falling. The wind was whistling round their ears. They were running back to camp to the tree where Bobuck slept. They were running to the creek, looking forward to a swim.

They thought no more about the men who'd climbed the mountain.

But when night came, the men had not returned. When Bobuck came down for his apple the people from all the tents were talking beneath his tree. The farmer said that if the men had not returned by morning a search party would go out to look for them.

Bobuck thought there would be no apple, but then the children saw him waiting and ran to get him one. Bobuck was glad they had remembered.

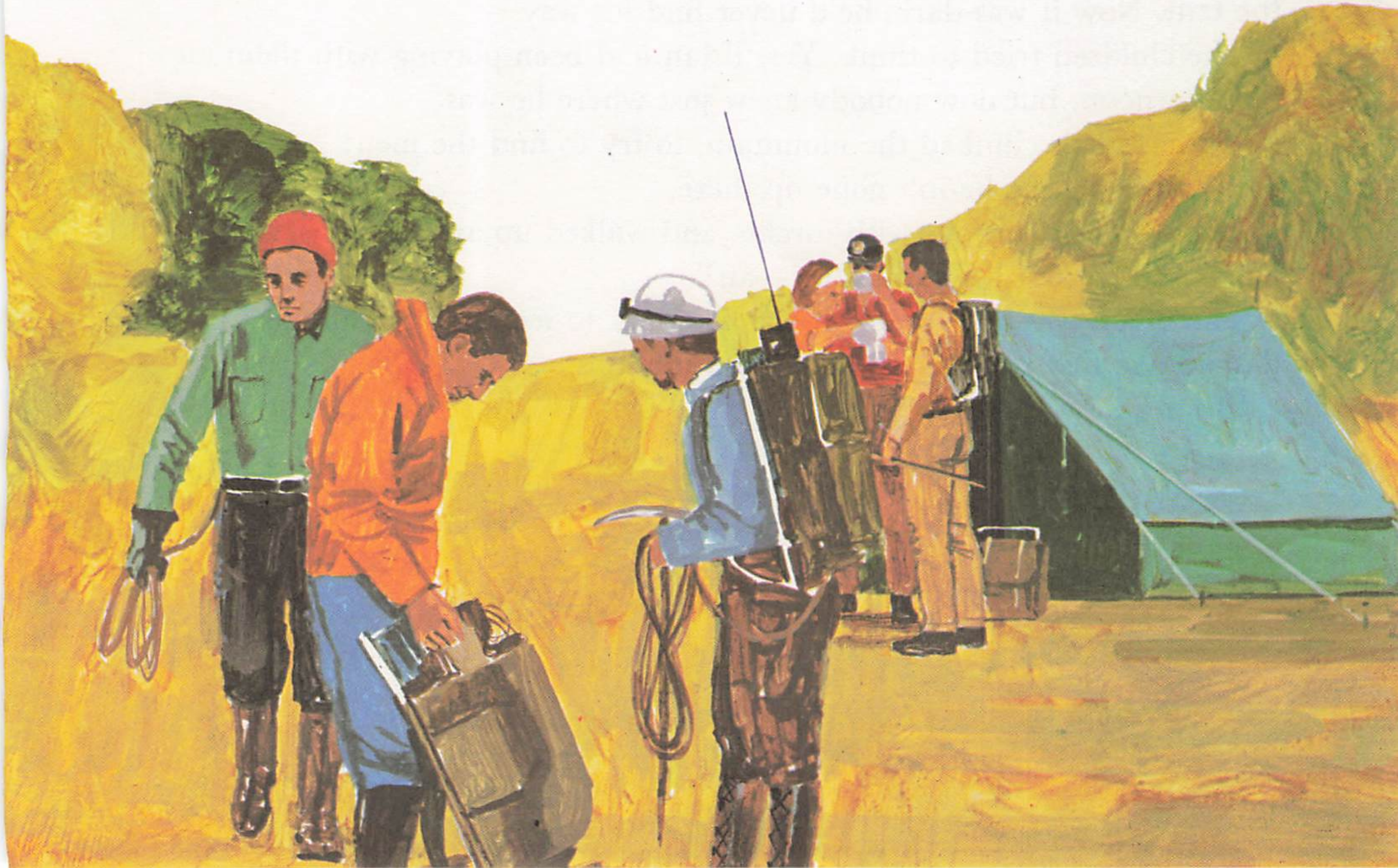


Morning came and possums were back in their holes, but underneath the tree all sorts of people were gathering. There were farmers from the district all around; they knew the mountain well. Any campers who could climb were there to help the farmers in their search.

Each man took a torch, warm clothes, some matches in his pocket and some food and water as they might be out all night. The leaders took a first aid kit in case the men were hurt.

The main tent underneath the tree would be the base, and all the news would be sent back to there.

They had walkie-talkie radios to send their messages back. The children would be able to help by listening to them.



By afternoon, the men had not been found. The army was called in.

'An army!' thought the possums. An army underneath their tree! The soldiers came in trucks and jeeps and tramped about beneath the tree. They had done their training here. They too knew the mountain well, and they could find the men if anybody could.

Then the helicopter came, propellors whirring like a giant bird. It went along the valley, looking, searching for the men.

At night, the people camped out on the mountain and the helicopter went away. But it would be back again tomorrow. The men had been up there for two days. They simply must be found.

When darkness came that night and Bobuck came down for his apple nobody had remembered. The people were very worried.

A child was missing now, a boy of eight called Brian, who lived here in the tent. Now it was dark, he'd never find his way.

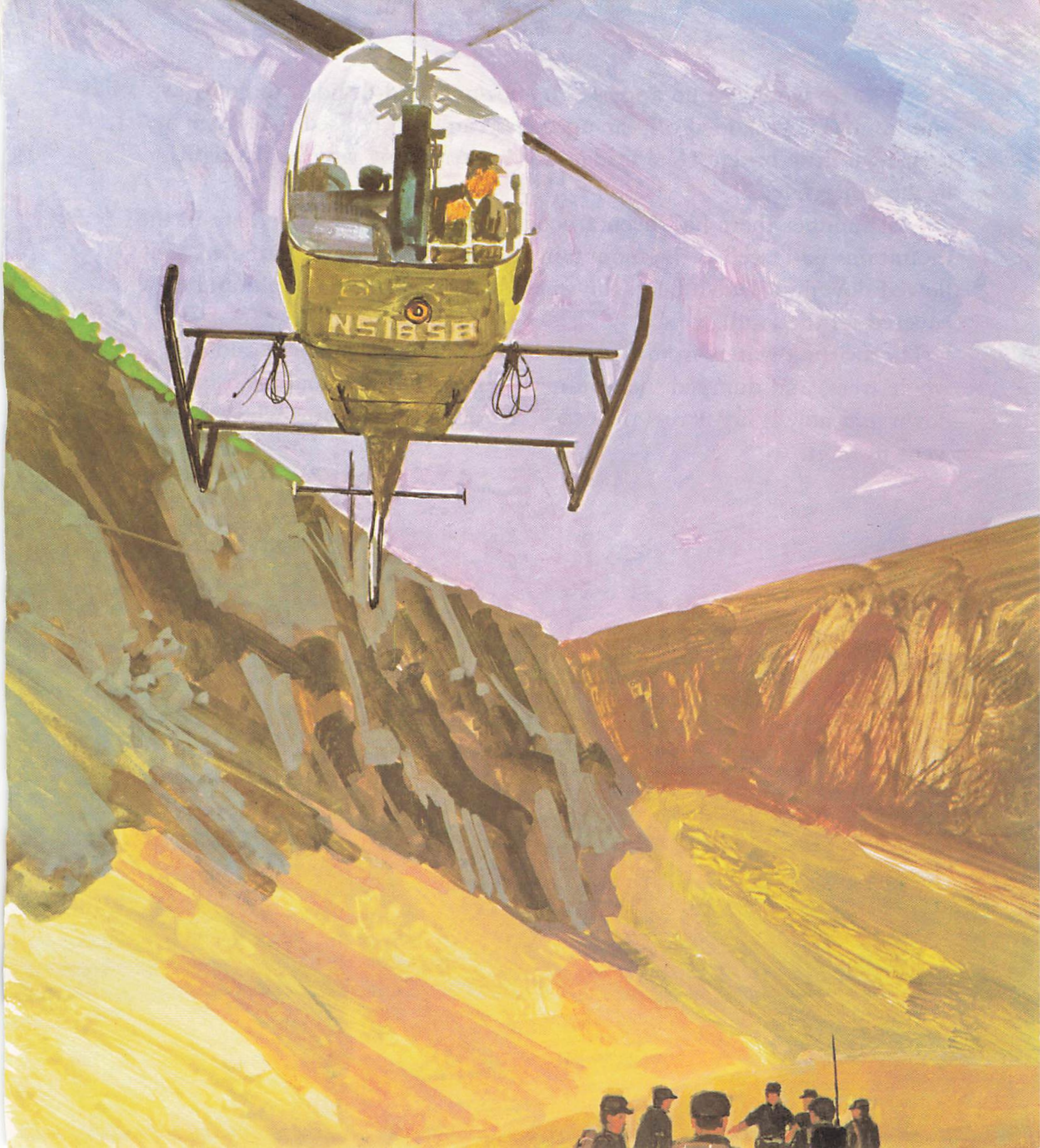
The children tried to think. Yes, Brian had been playing with them all the afternoon, but now nobody knew just where he was.

'Perhaps he's climbed the mountain, to try to find the men!' They all hoped he hadn't gone up there.

The women went out with torches and walked up and down the creek banks, calling out his name: 'Bri—an!'

The moon was not yet up; it was too dark to see. The torchlights flashed like tiny stars all up and down the hills.

'Brian!' . . . . 'Brian!'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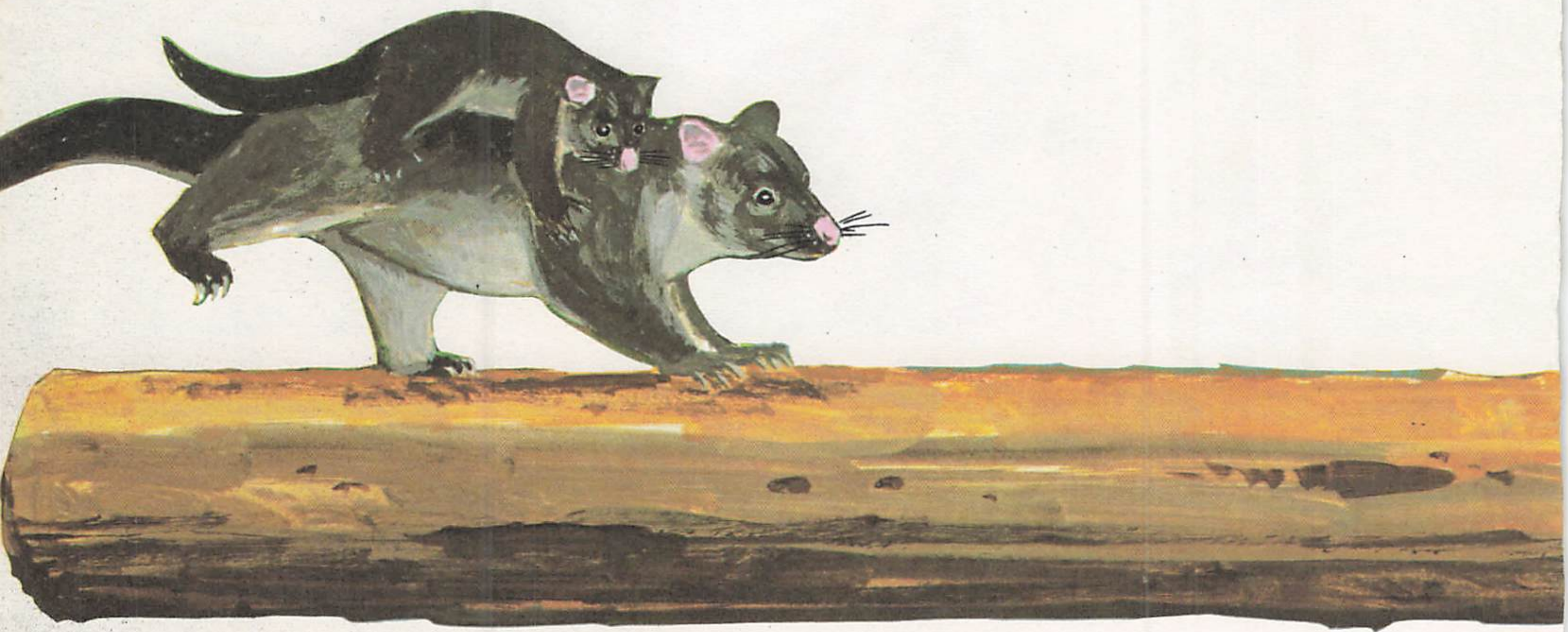
So—there would be no apples. The possums had decided to go away and hunt. They padded off, far up the stream and crossed the water by their own little bridge. The bridge was a narrow log running straight to the other side.

Last summer there had been a flood. Heavy rains high up there in the mountains had swelled the mountain streams. More water gathered as it flowed downhill. Down here, the water had crept up the banks and covered all the land.

The swirling waters from the hills had brought down sticks and logs, whole trees, and dumped them in new homes. This log had been brought down and now it lay across the creek, a bridge for possums when they went to hunt.



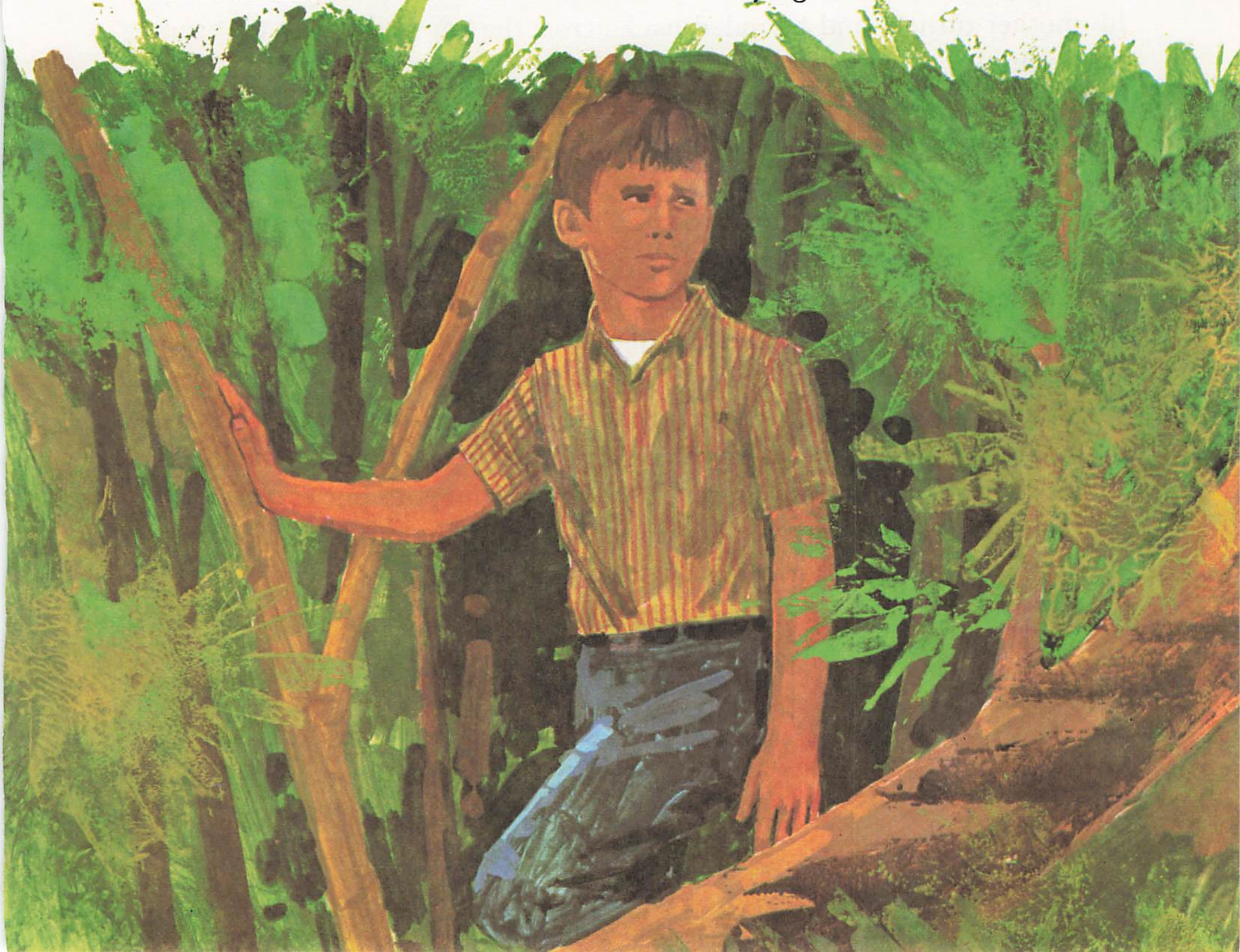
Bobuck was riding on his mother's back, riding along without a care, when suddenly his mother stopped. Her back was straight, her body stiff, and Bobuck almost fell right off!

She knew someone was standing near. That could mean danger. She called out loud: 'Uh-uh-uh-uh!' Eyes gleaming in the dark, she stood up straight all ready to fight.

It was a little boy. One of the boys who had given them apples.

It was Brian.

Brian was lost and now it was dark. He was trying not to be afraid,



but he simply didn't know what to do. He'd crossed the creek in the afternoon and walked along looking up at the hill. He'd seen the helicopter whirling around, going down the valley like a giant bird.

Then it had grown dark and he was alone.

Brian looked at the possums. It was good to see some friends. He wished that they could show him the way home to the tree.

The possums blinked at Brian. They would have liked to help, but they still felt there was danger. They decided to go back home.

Bobuck blinked at Brian. He didn't know how to help. Then suddenly his mother turned, and bounded back across the creek, the way that she had come.

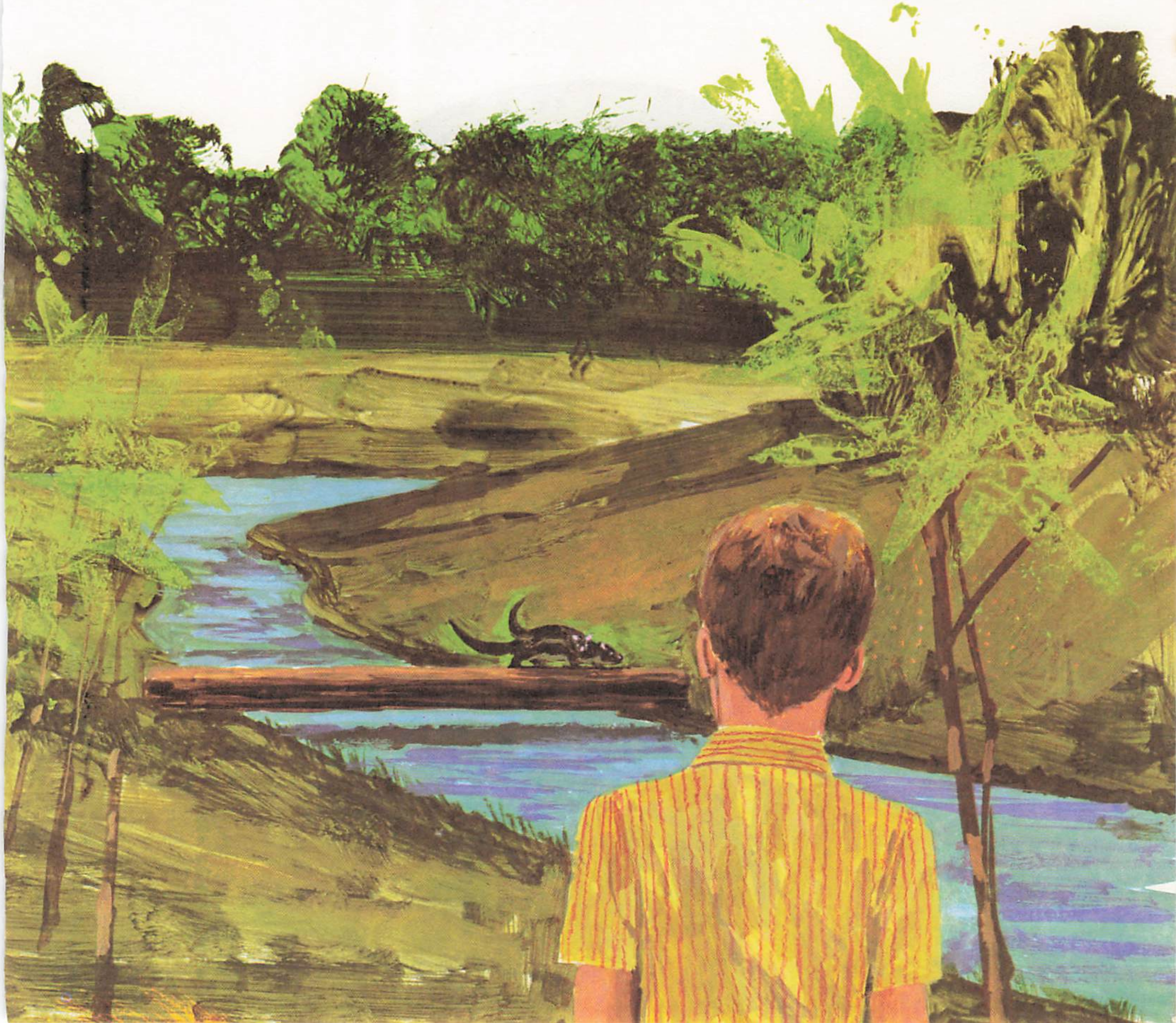
Bobuck's mother, with Bobuck on her back, scampered lightly across the the log, and stood very still on the other side, waiting to see what Brian would do.

Brian watched the possums cross the creek by the fallen log, and wondered: 'If they can go that way, perhaps *I* can!'

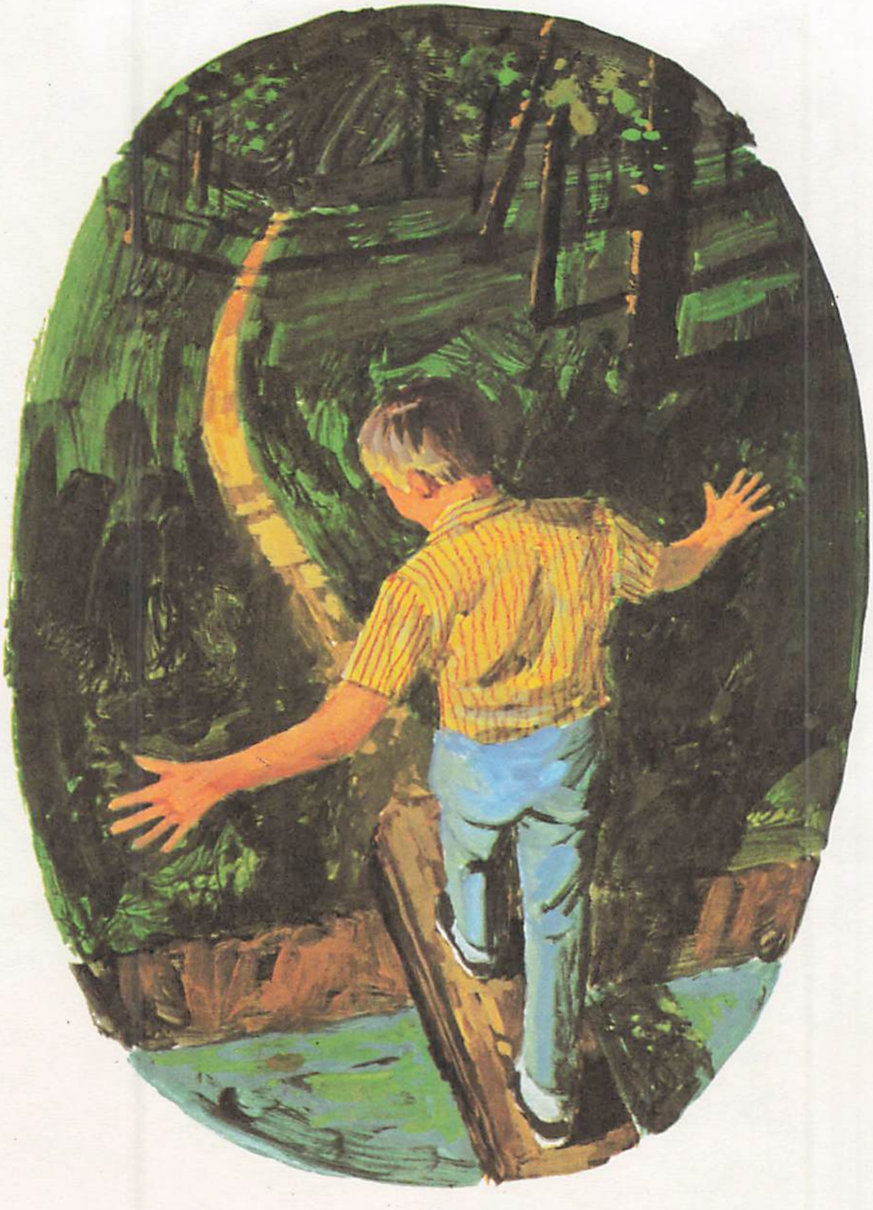
He put one foot, very carefully, on the end of the log, and felt it move and sway. Perhaps this would be dangerous. He might fall in the water. He couldn't see how deep it was down there.

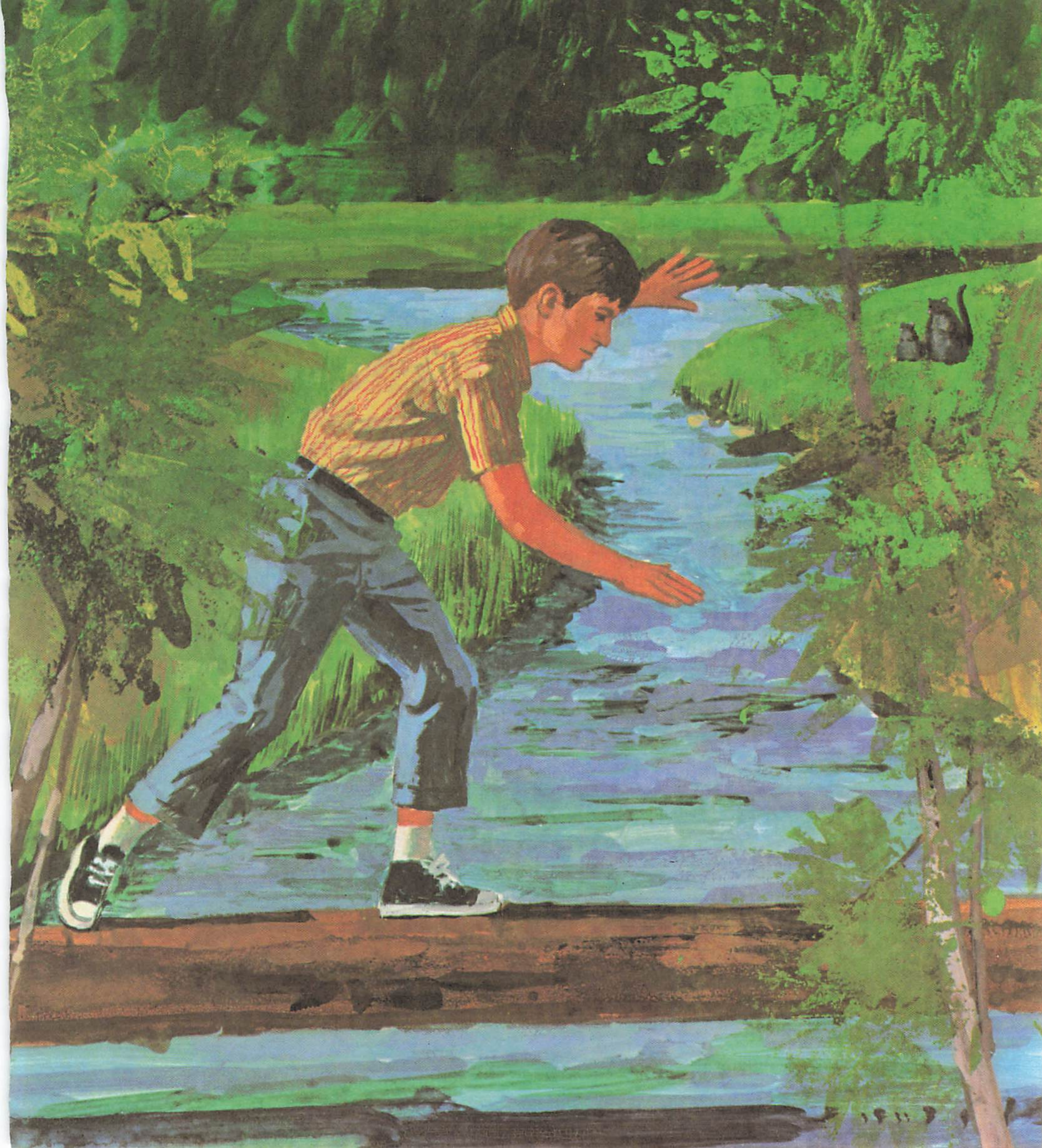
The possums watched his progress, from the other side of the creek.

Carefully, one foot and then the other, Brian stepped out on the log. It was so dark around him he could hardly see where to put each foot. The banks were only bumps and shadows. If only the moon would come up! However now he had started he must go on.



Then, just as he reached the middle, the moon rose in the sky and lit up the path like a golden road. Now Brian could see that the path was wide and strong enough to hold him as he went across. He was still careful, but now he could see! And so he crossed in safety and arrived on the other side.





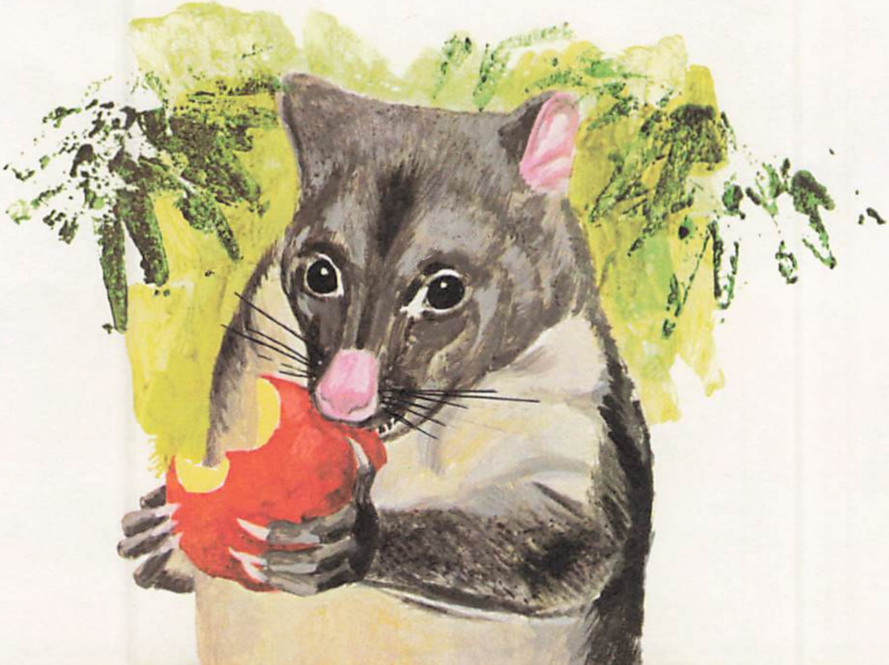
The possums scampered on ahead on the way back to their tree. Now, with the moon so round and full, the boy could find his way back to the tent.

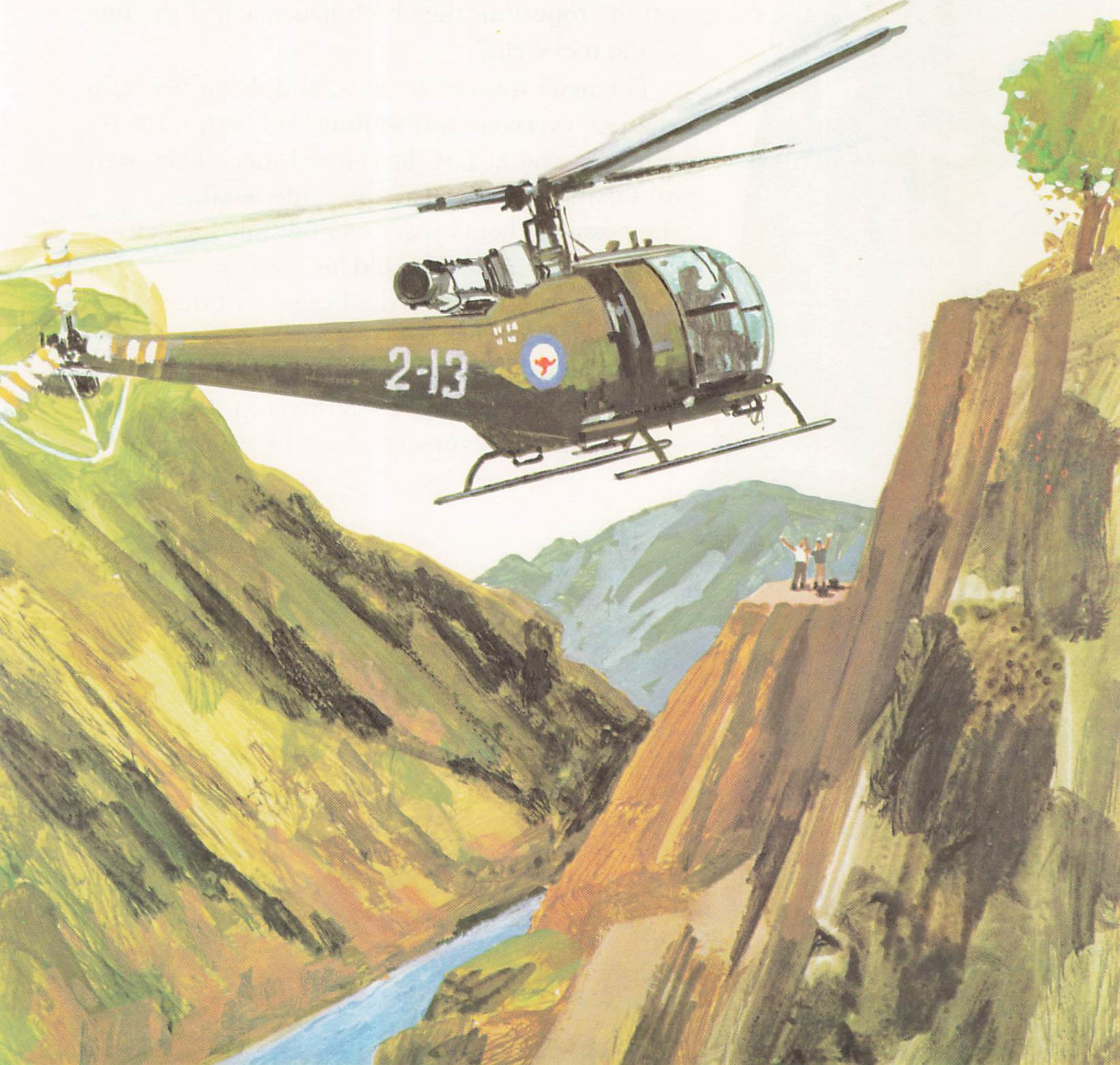
Everyone was glad to see him safely back again. The possums scampered up the tree, and sat still up there, watching. Before he went to bed Brian remembered to leave some pieces of apple at the bottom of the tree where Bobuck would be able to find them.

The boy was found, but the men were still lost on the mountain and the search went on to find them.

It was Monday, and everyone was looking for some sign. Then the men in the helicopter saw a flash of colour on a ledge and went in closer to see—and there were the men, stranded out on a ledge of rock where the cliff had fallen away and cut them off from their path. With the cliff the way it was now, they could never have climbed to the track. Men can't climb where possums can.

The helicopter sent the message on its radio and the base camp sent a message to the searchers to tell them where to go. The searchers went to that side of the mountain and looked down on the ledge.

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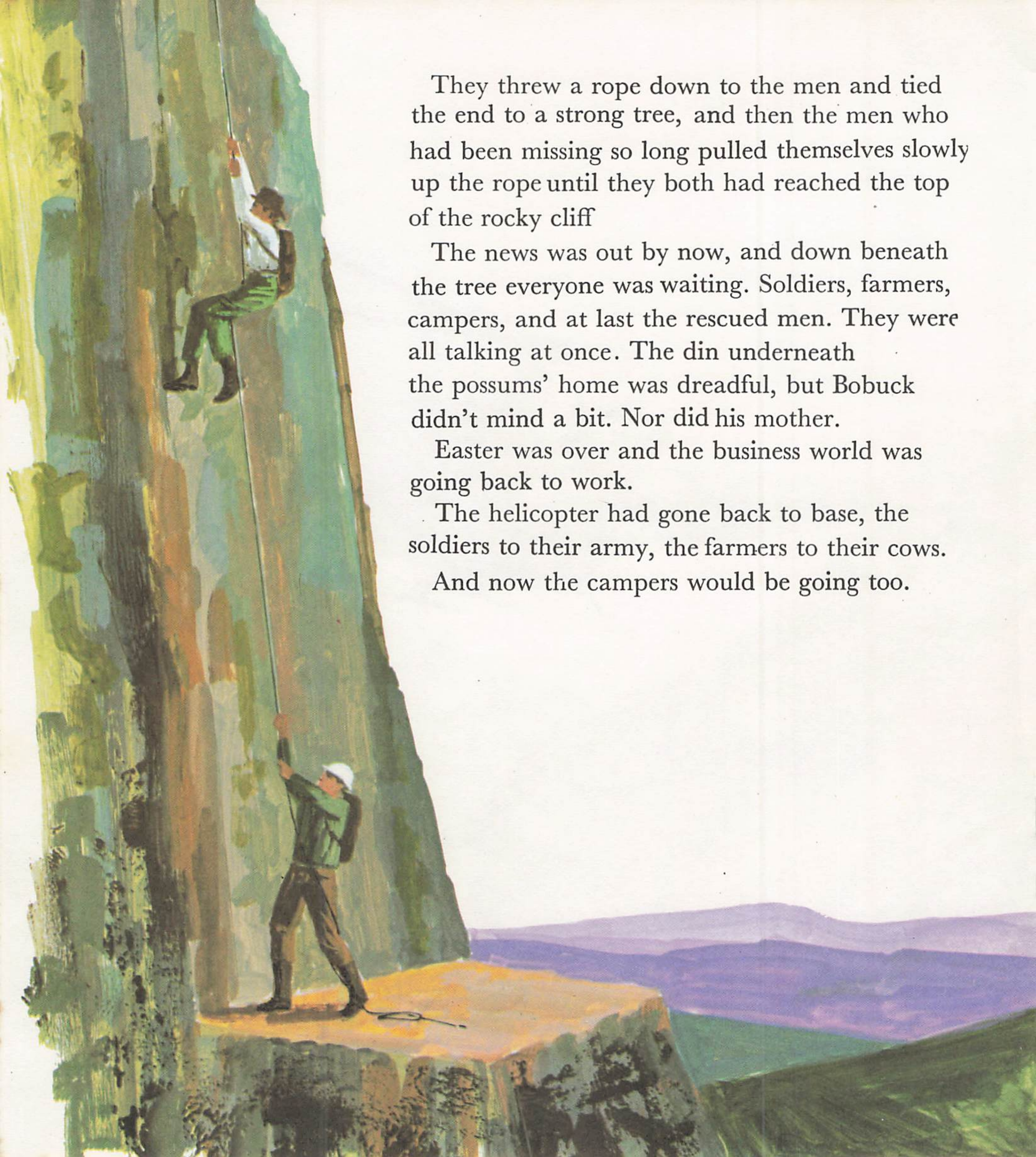


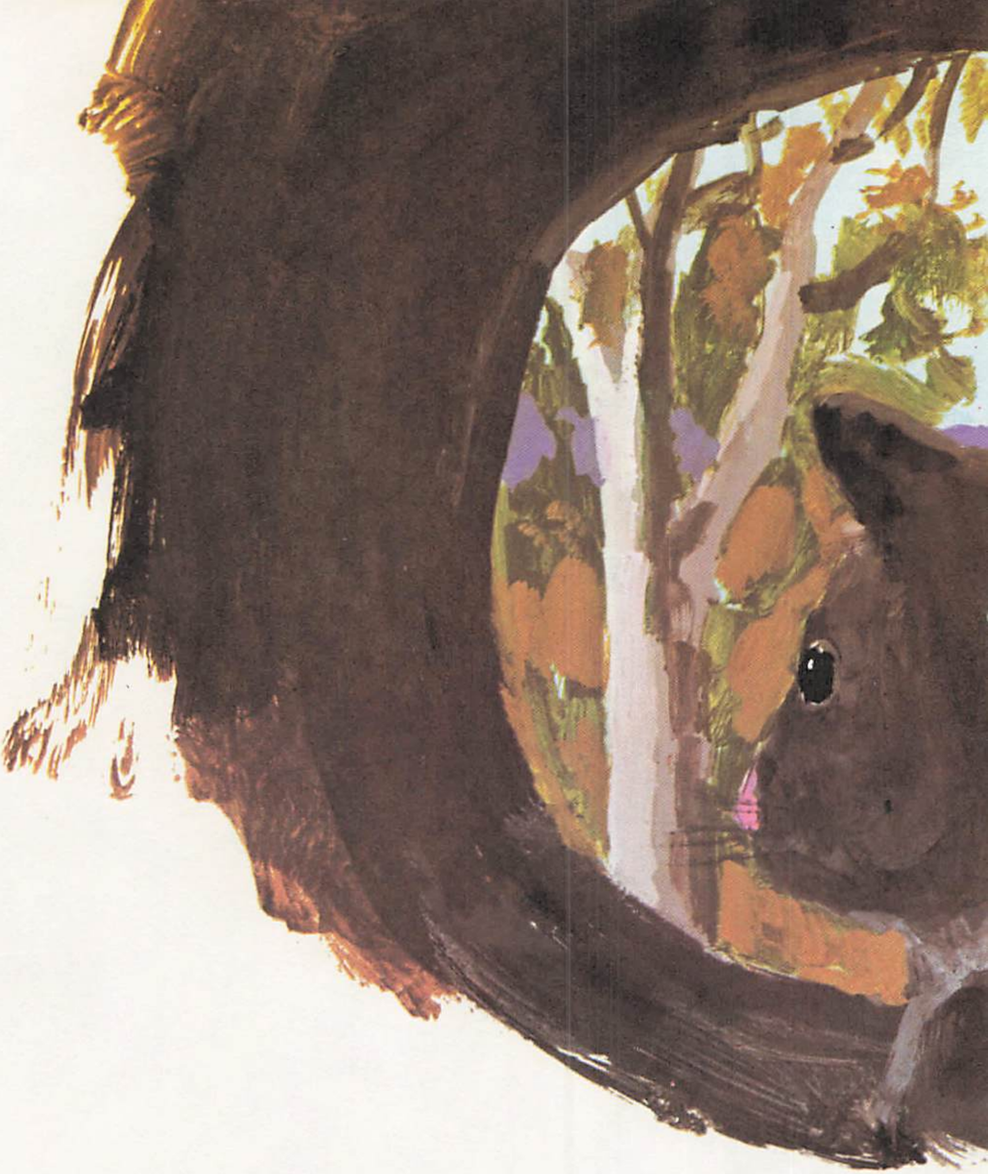
They threw a rope down to the men and tied the end to a strong tree, and then the men who had been missing so long pulled themselves slowly up the rope until they both had reached the top of the rocky cliff

The news was out by now, and down beneath the tree everyone was waiting. Soldiers, farmers, campers, and at last the rescued men. They were all talking at once. The din underneath the possums' home was dreadful, but Bobuck didn't mind a bit. Nor did his mother.

Easter was over and the business world was going back to work.

The helicopter had gone back to base, the soldiers to their army, the farmers to their cows.

And now the campers would be going too.



Sadly, the children said goodbye, to the creek and to the tree, to the rocks on which they'd painted faces. They looked up to the mountain. They looked high up the tree, and said goodbye to their possum friends.

Sadly, Bobuck watched them go. His little world was different now. Everything was quiet.

'Now at last we'll get some sleep,' said his mother.

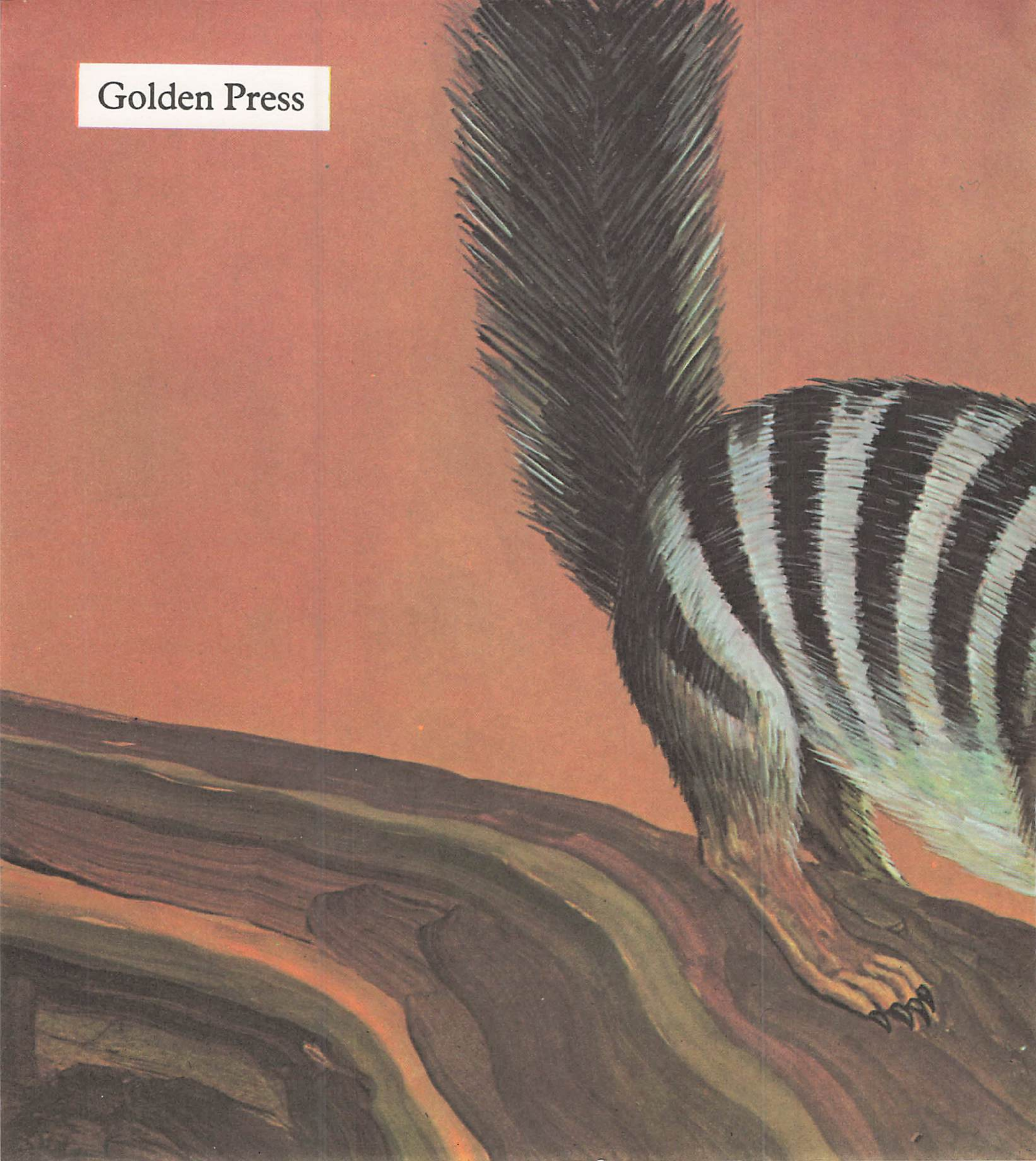
'But the people? When will the people come back?' asked Bobuck.

'And the children?'

'The children will be back. They've all gone off to their own homes now, but they'll be back, quite soon. You'll see. Perhaps very soon, there'll be more campers in a car. Another family will come.'

Bobuck could hardly wait. His bushy tail quivered and his ears bristled with excitement as he asked his mother happily:
'Will there be apples?'

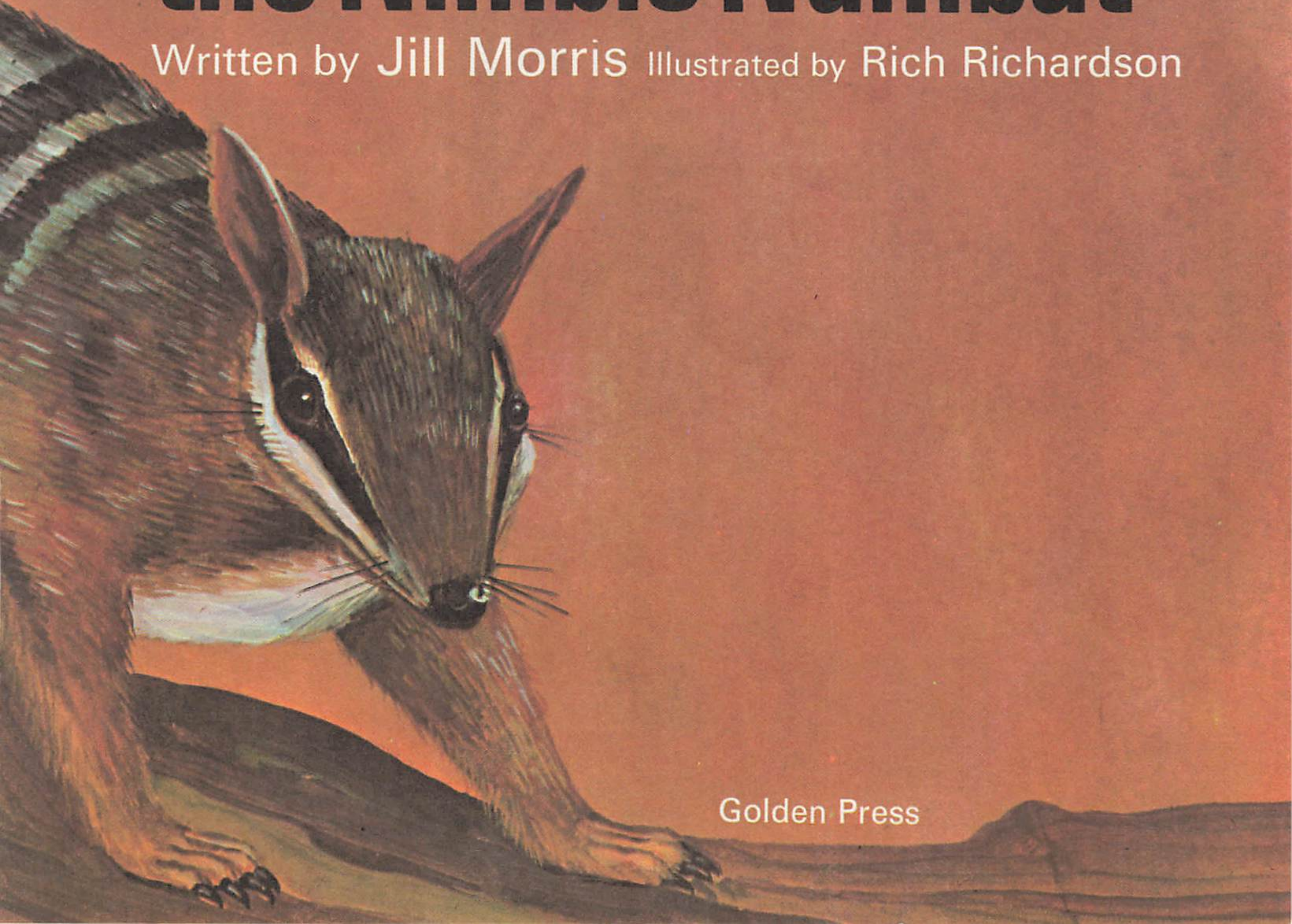
Golden Press



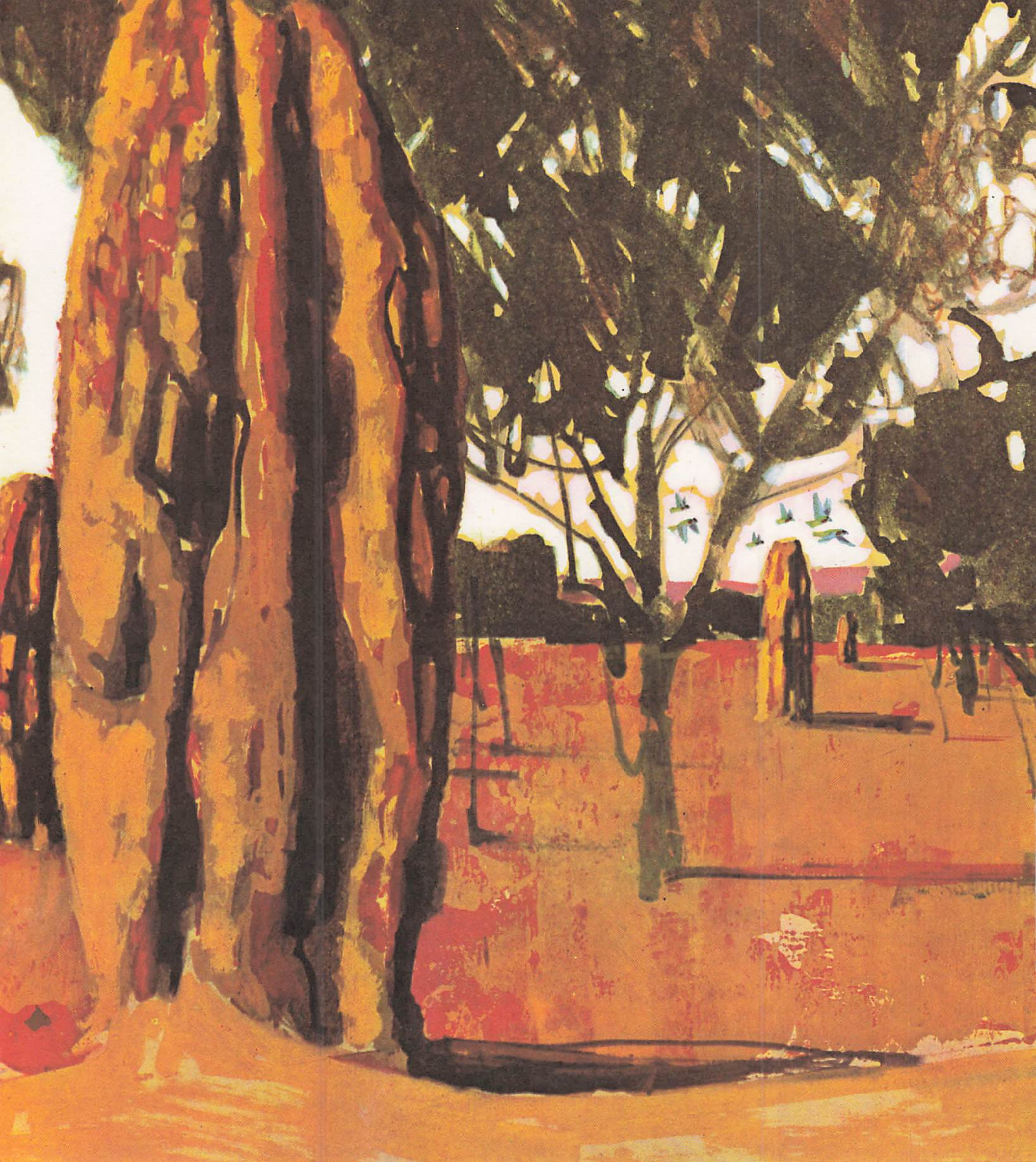
# Rusty

# the Nimble Numbat

Written by Jill Morris Illustrated by Rich Richardson



Golden Press

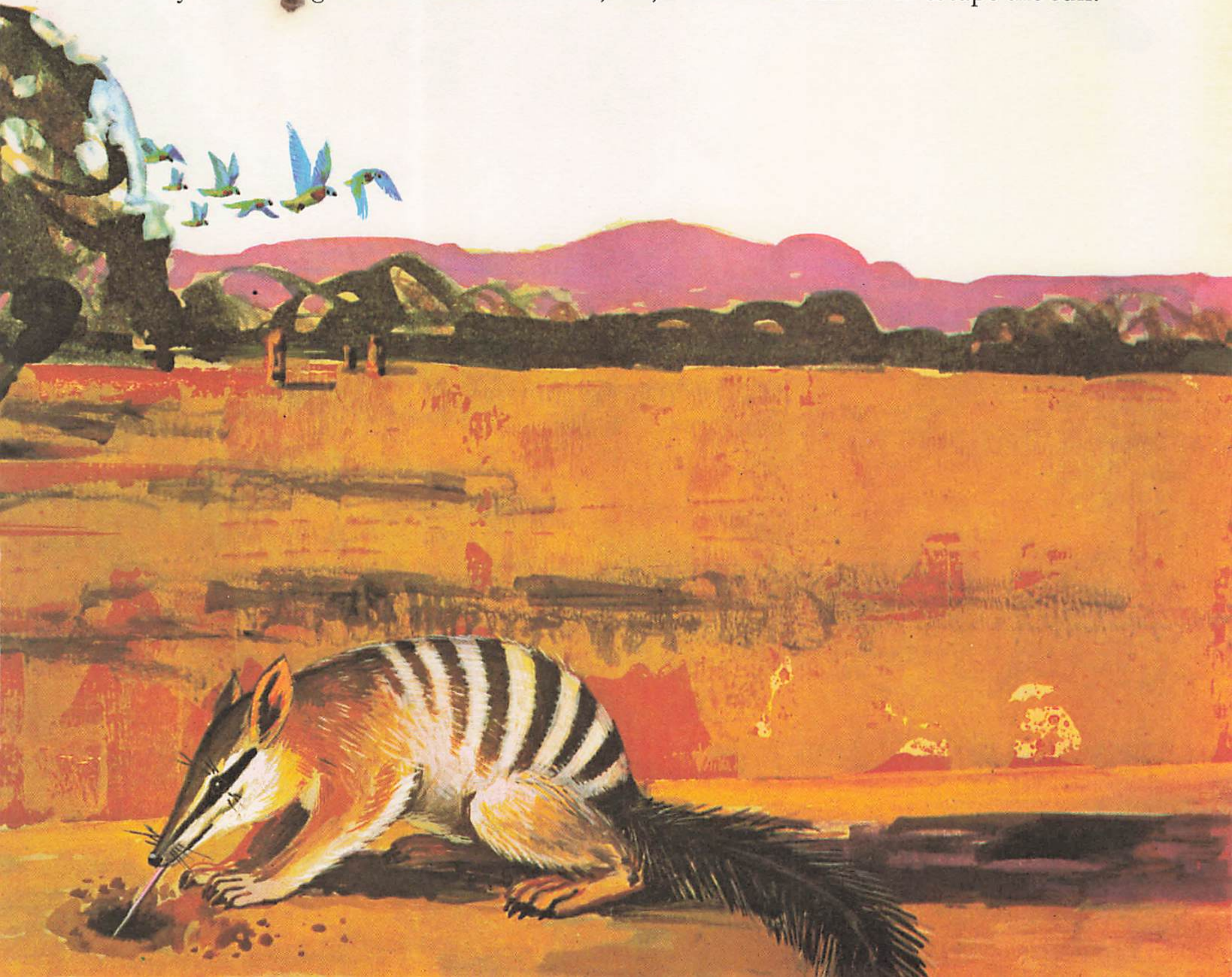


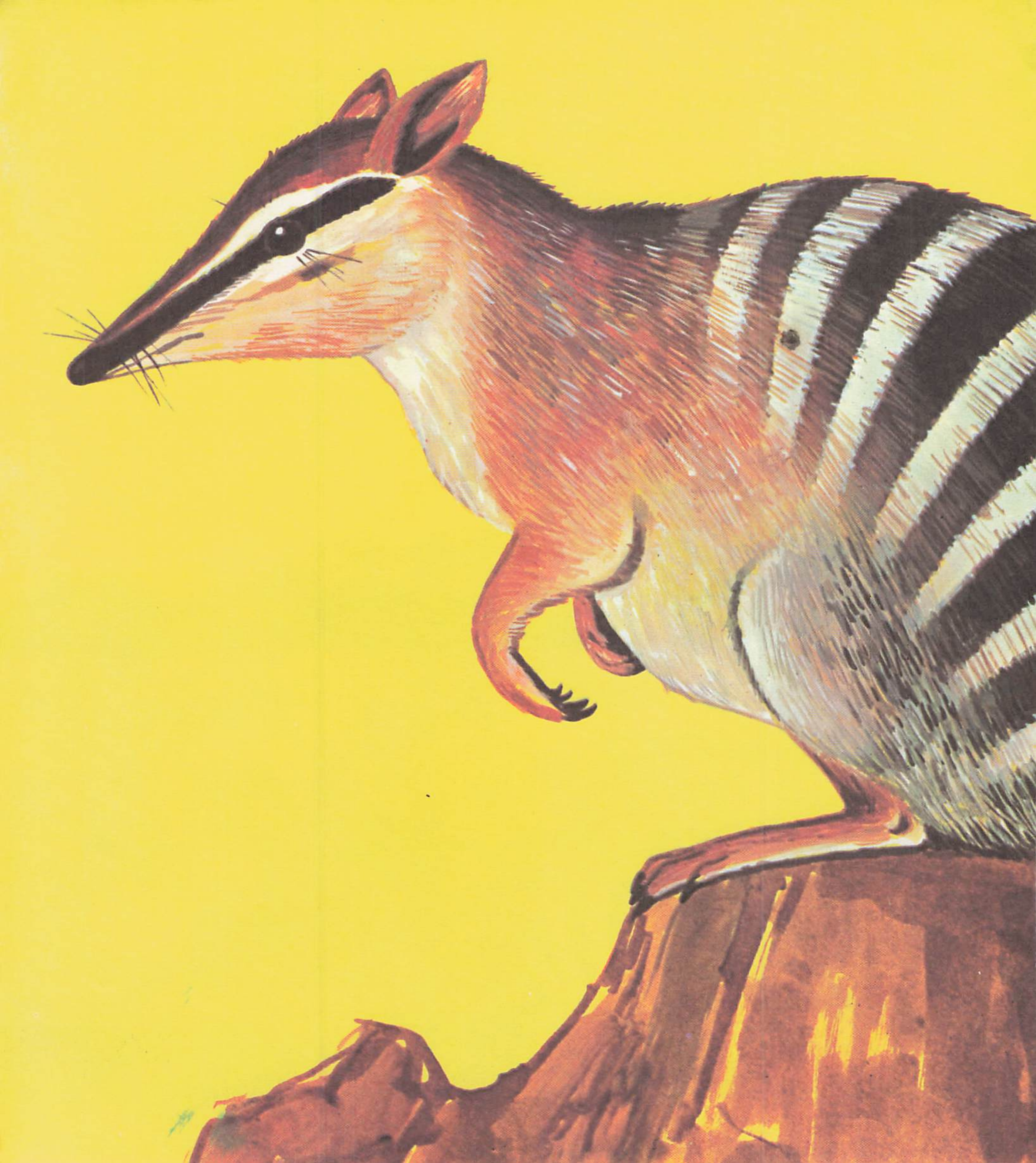
A flock of parrots came swooping down over the rocky mountains. 'CRAH! CRAH!' Their bright feathers flashed as they flew off in a red and green cloud.

Nothing else stirred. Most of the animals living on the hill were already asleep in their burrows, hiding from the sun that scorched this hot desert land.

Rusty poked his snout into a tunnel and began to shovel termites into his mouth with his long, sticky, pink tongue. The outside of the termite mound was so hard that even Rusty's strong nose could not break through it. Instead, he would find the termites by their smell, and dig up the tunnels they made!

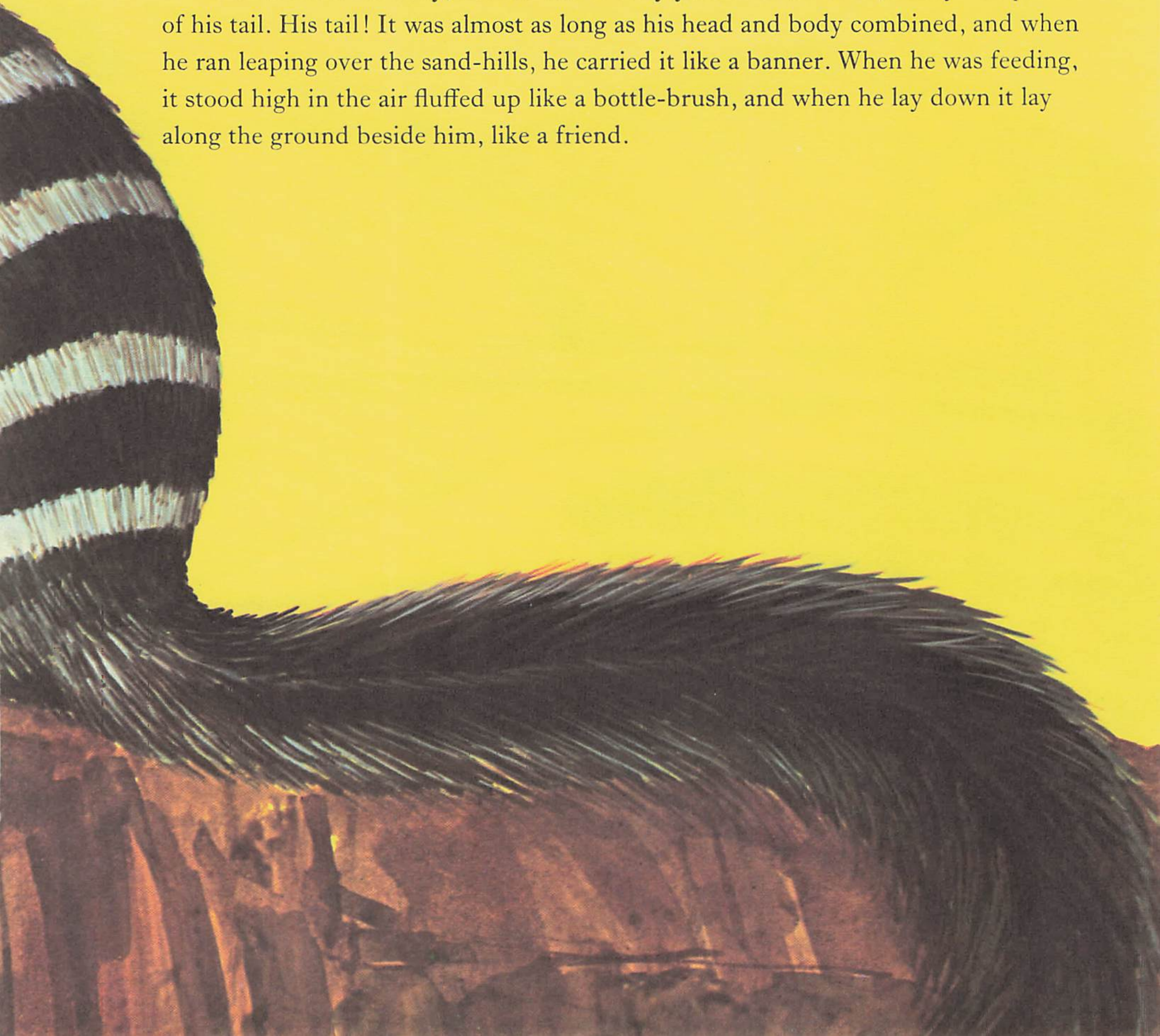
Rusty was having one last meal before he, too, went to his burrow to escape the sun.



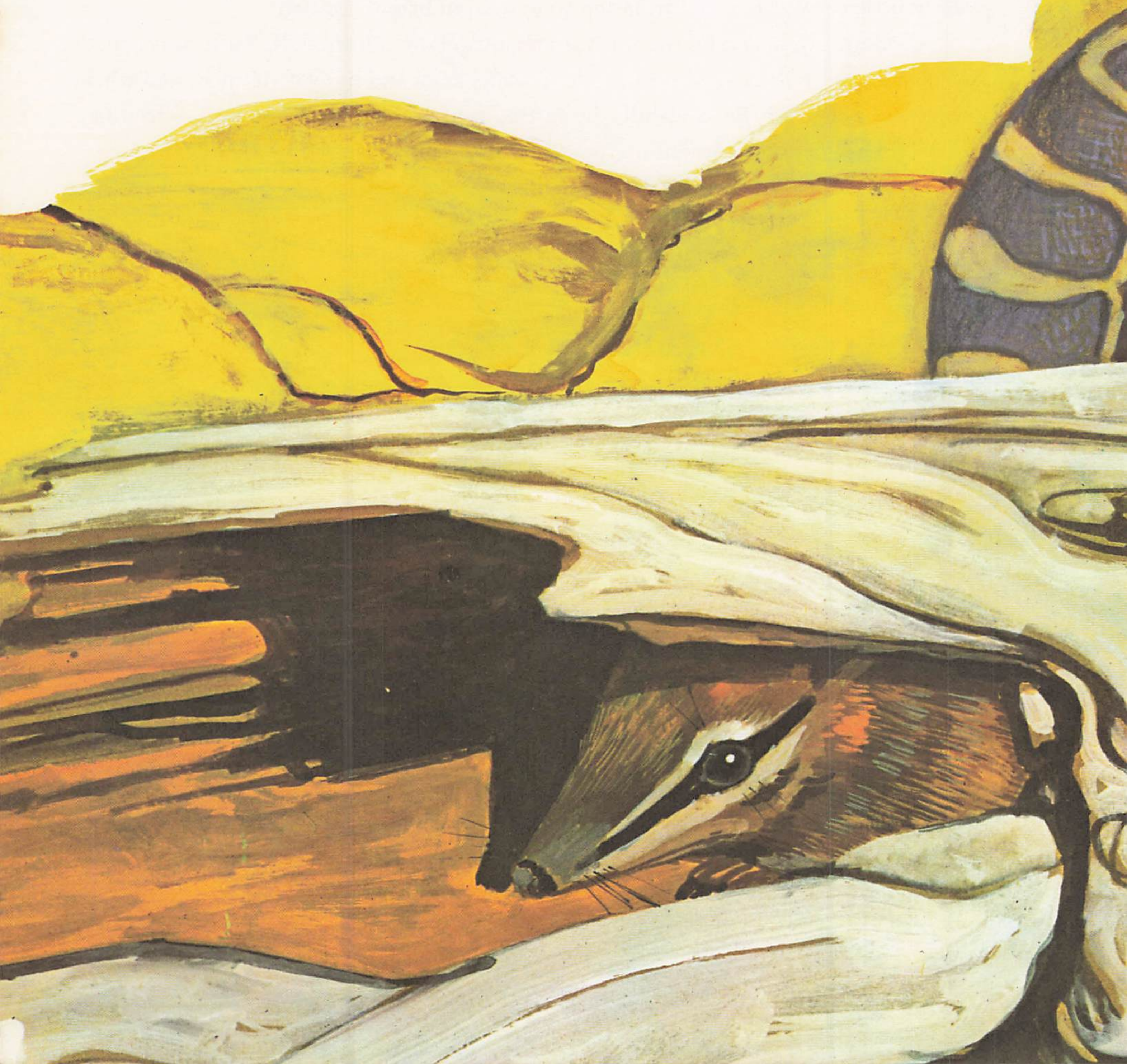


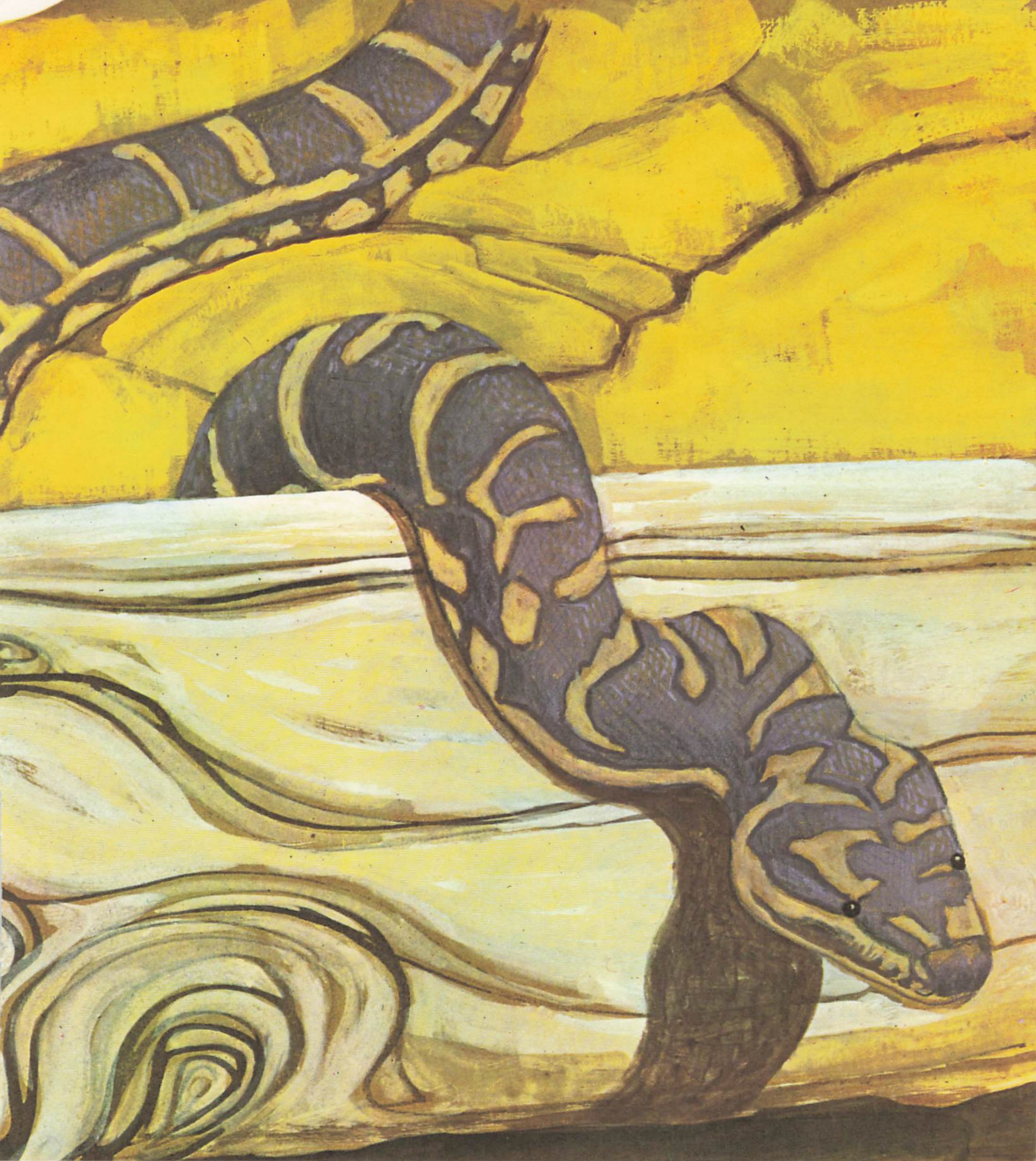
Rusty was mostly red all over, a warm brownish red like burnt toffee, with tiny pencil lines of purest white. Across his back, seven smart white stripes stood out against the darker fur. On each side of his face one long white stripe ran past his eye, with a darker stripe below it. They were like arrows pointing to his eyes. Each sharp little ear was covered from top to bottom in bright red hairs.

Underneath his body, the fur was creamy yellow. Most of all, Rusty was proud of his tail. His tail! It was almost as long as his head and body combined, and when he ran leaping over the sand-hills, he carried it like a banner. When he was feeding, it stood high in the air fluffed up like a bottle-brush, and when he lay down it lay along the ground beside him, like a friend.

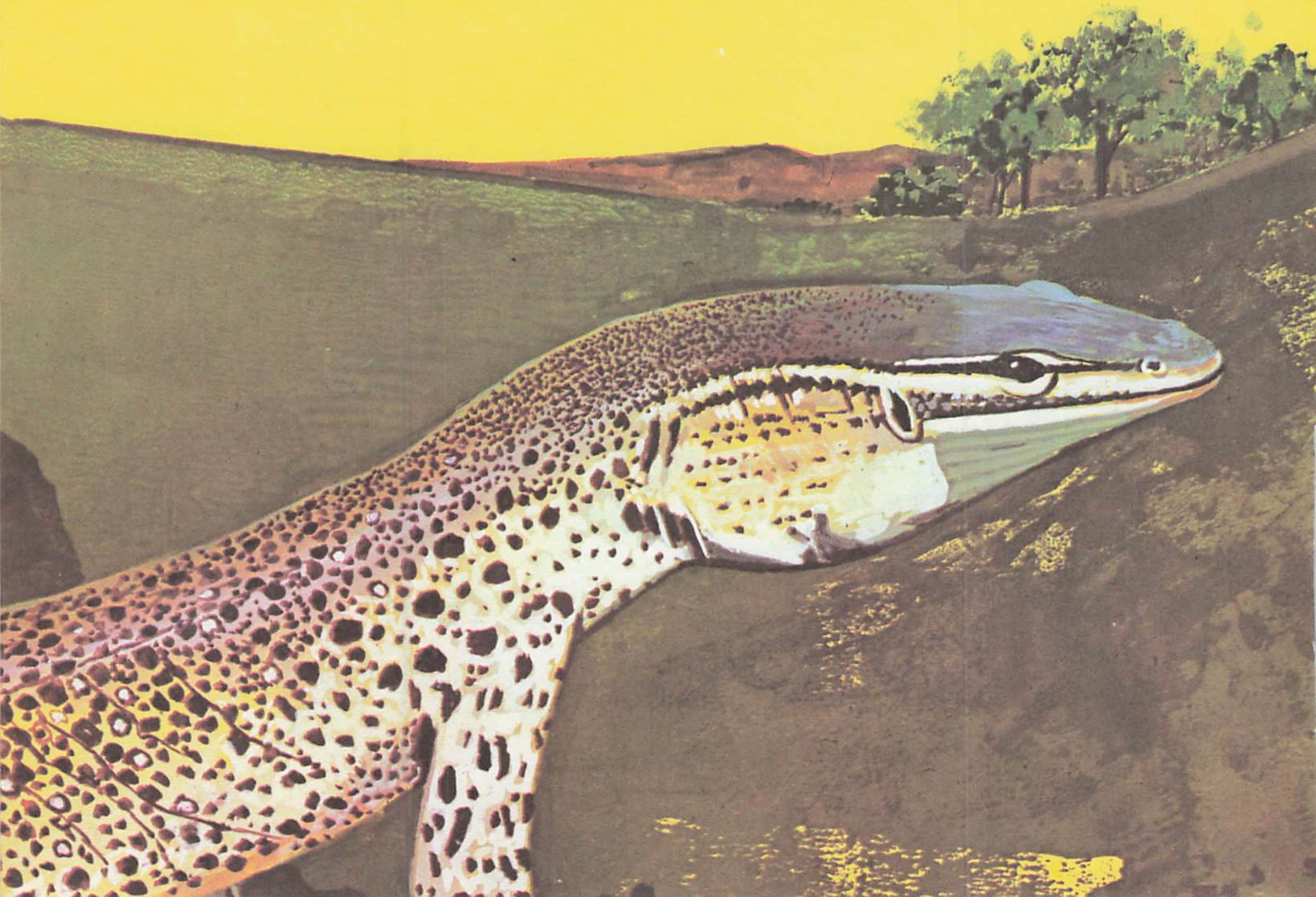


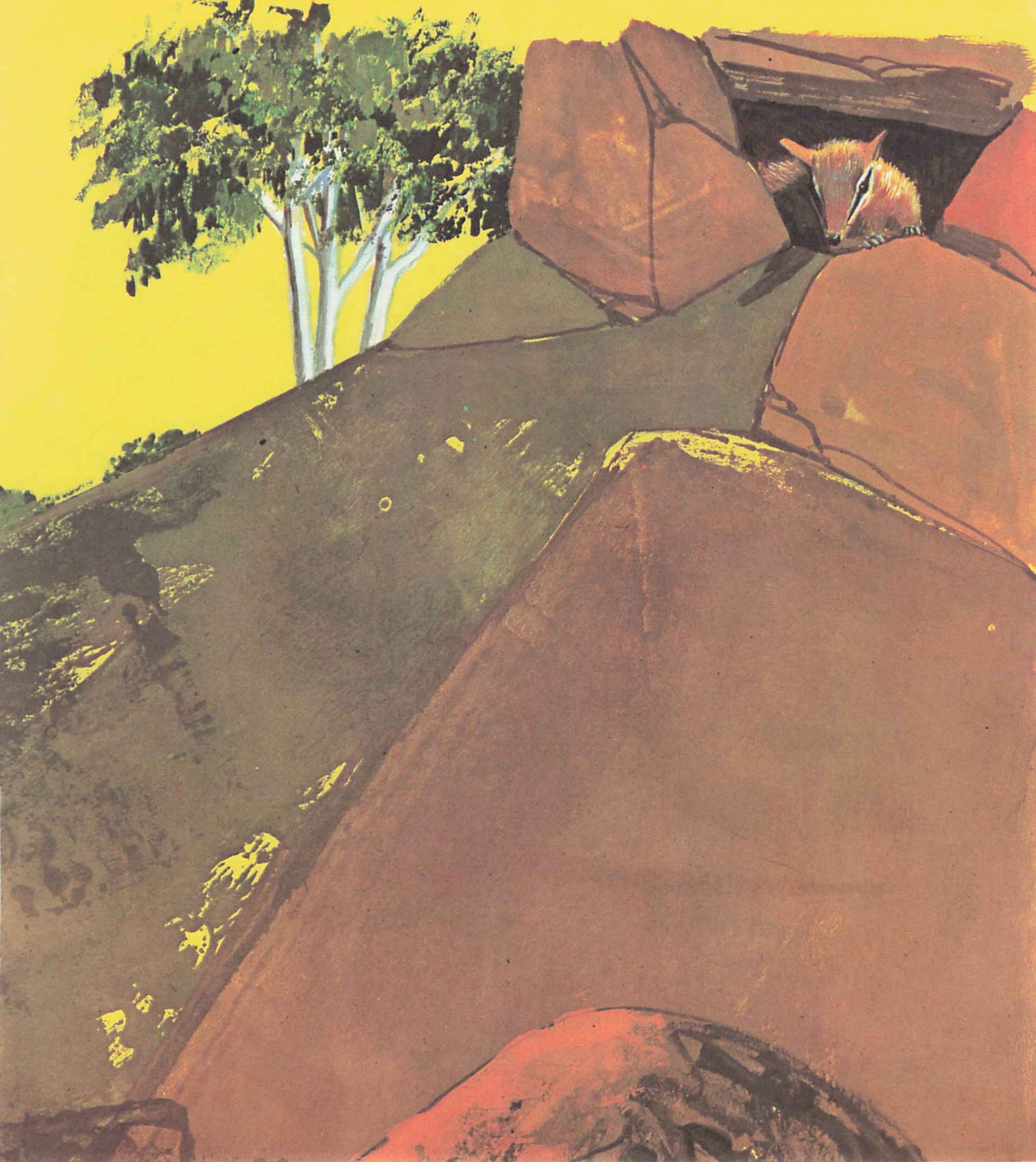
There were many other animals living on the hill, some of them Rusty's enemies. Quite often he had to hide. Carpet snake, for one, would love to catch Rusty and make him into a fat lump meal inside his belly, to be digested slowly.

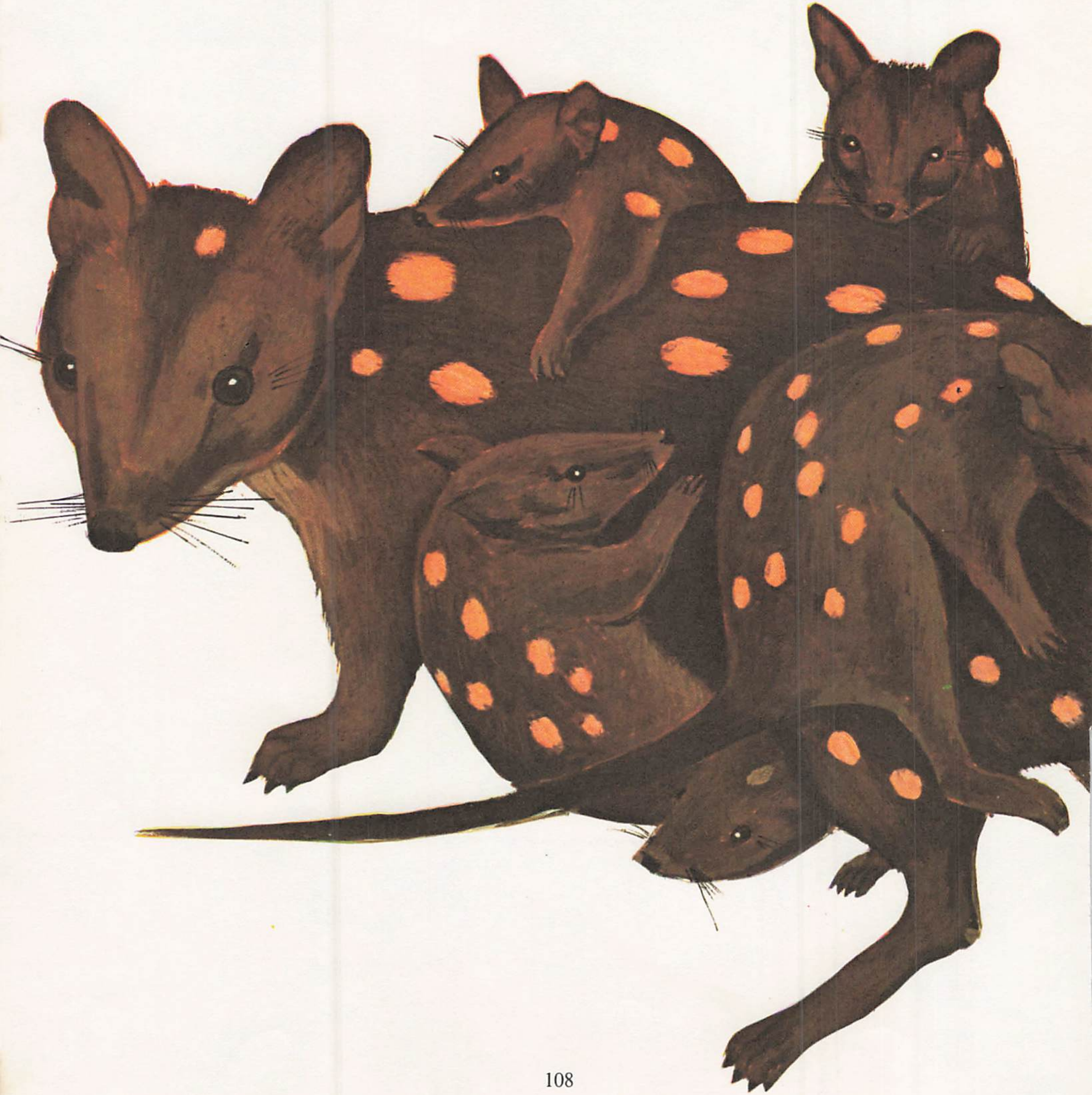




Sand Goanna hunted him too, all five frightening feet of him. Rusty would stand listening while Goanna crept up stealthily, then off he would run to the safety of his burrow or a crack high in the rocks. He could flatten his body into a shape more like a snake than a squirrel, and there in the hole he would shelter until Sand Goanna went away.



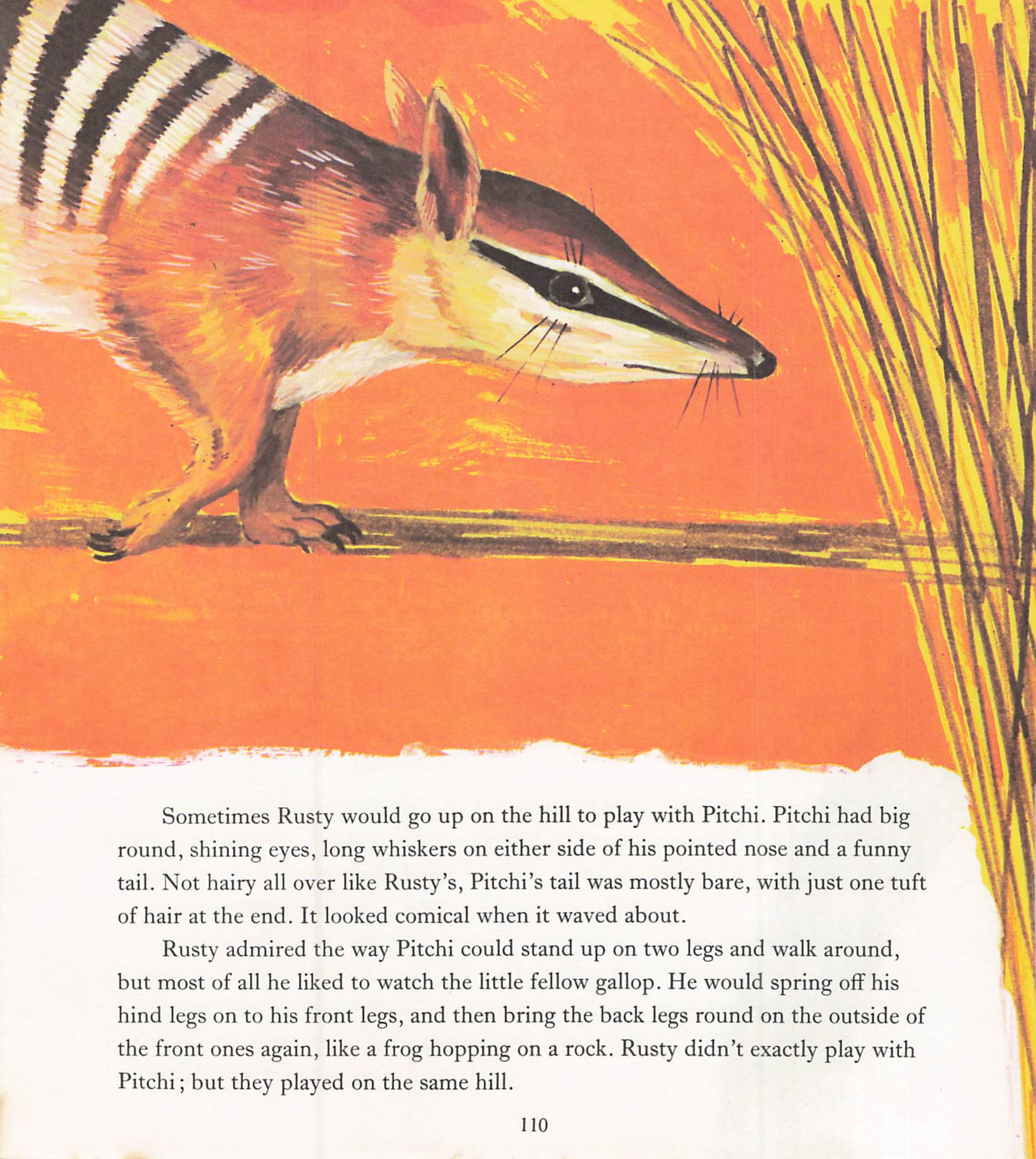




Another enemy was Chuditch the native cat; most of the animals were afraid of her. She could spring lightly over the rocks, and with five young cubs to feed she was always out hunting. When Rusty heard her cry at night, he would hide in his burrow and pretend not to hear, knowing there was danger out on the hill.

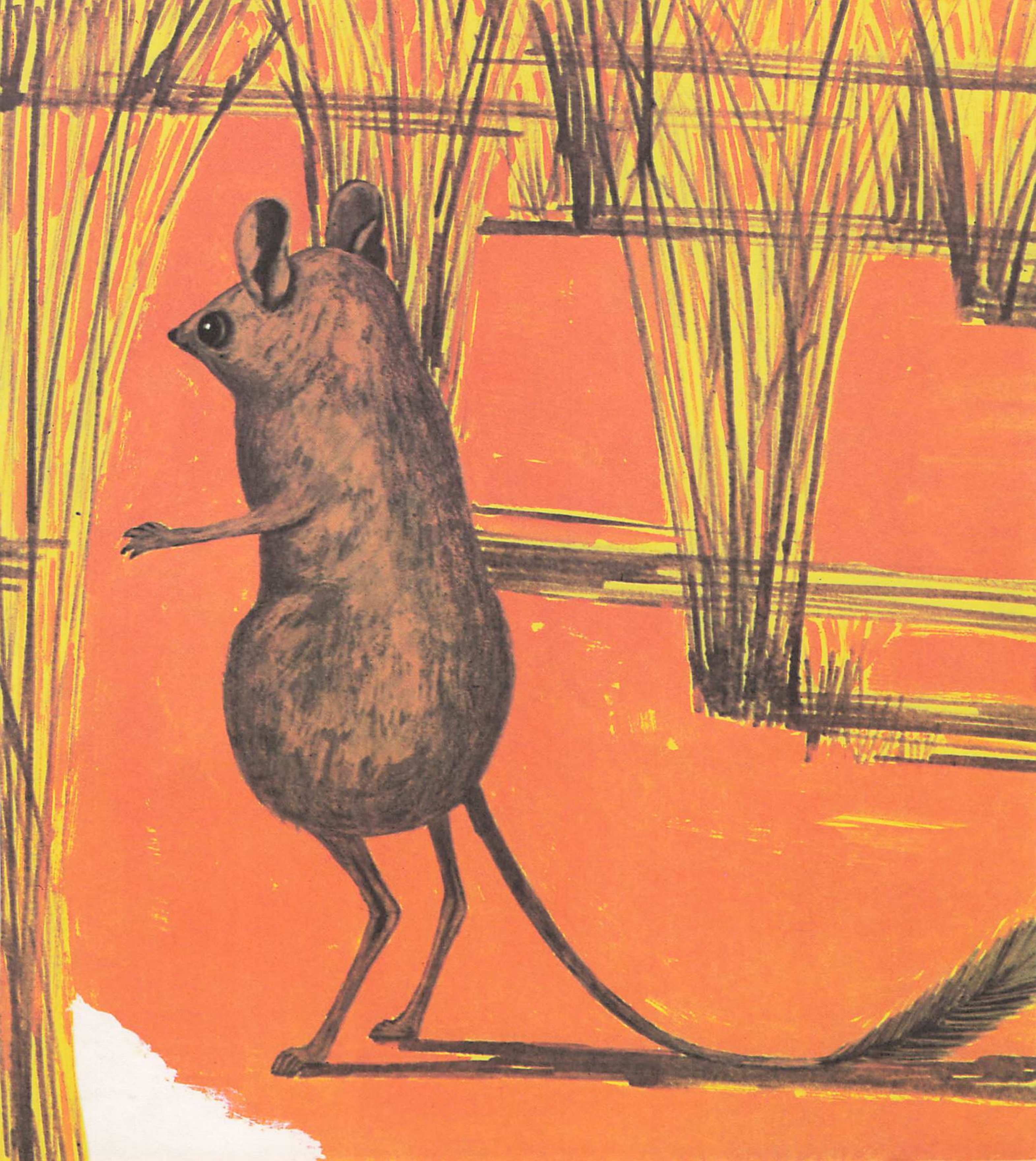
Rusty tried to eat when it was quiet; but if he was startled while feeding, he would sit upright like a small kangaroo, dark eyes popping with surprise. Then, if the danger was not too great, he would go back to eating; for Rusty liked eating best of all.

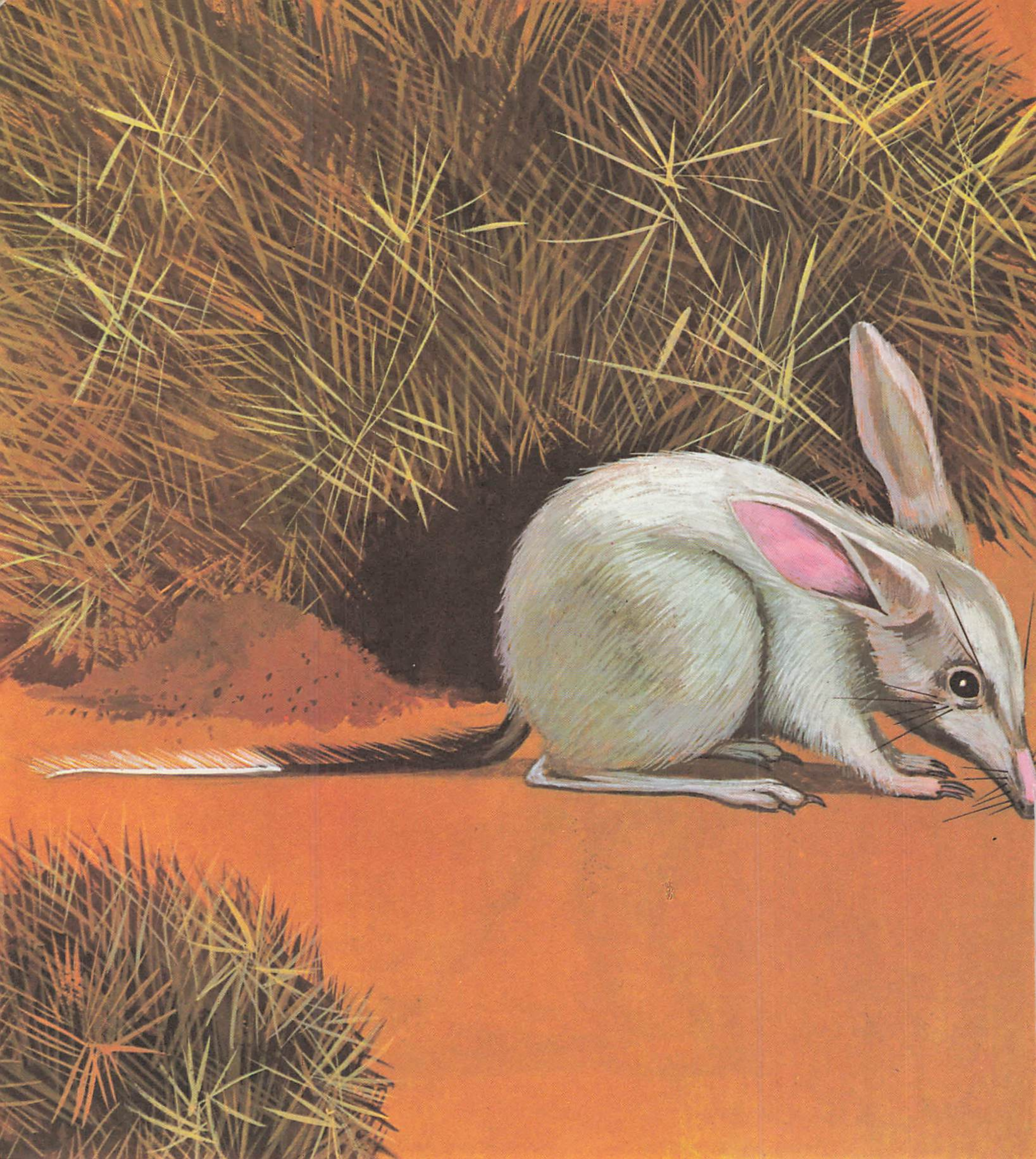
After feeding, before the sun became too hot, he would lie stretched on a rock, all four legs and tail spread out, thoroughly comfortable and enjoying himself. Then he would go back to his burrow, where he had a little nest of grass and leaves to crawl into.



Sometimes Rusty would go up on the hill to play with Pitchi. Pitchi had big round, shining eyes, long whiskers on either side of his pointed nose and a funny tail. Not hairy all over like Rusty's, Pitchi's tail was mostly bare, with just one tuft of hair at the end. It looked comical when it waved about.

Rusty admired the way Pitchi could stand up on two legs and walk around, but most of all he liked to watch the little fellow gallop. He would spring off his hind legs on to his front legs, and then bring the back legs round on the outside of the front ones again, like a frog hopping on a rock. Rusty didn't exactly play with Pitchi; but they played on the same hill.

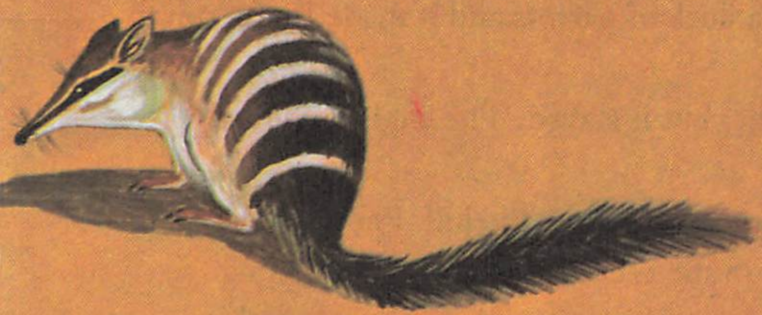


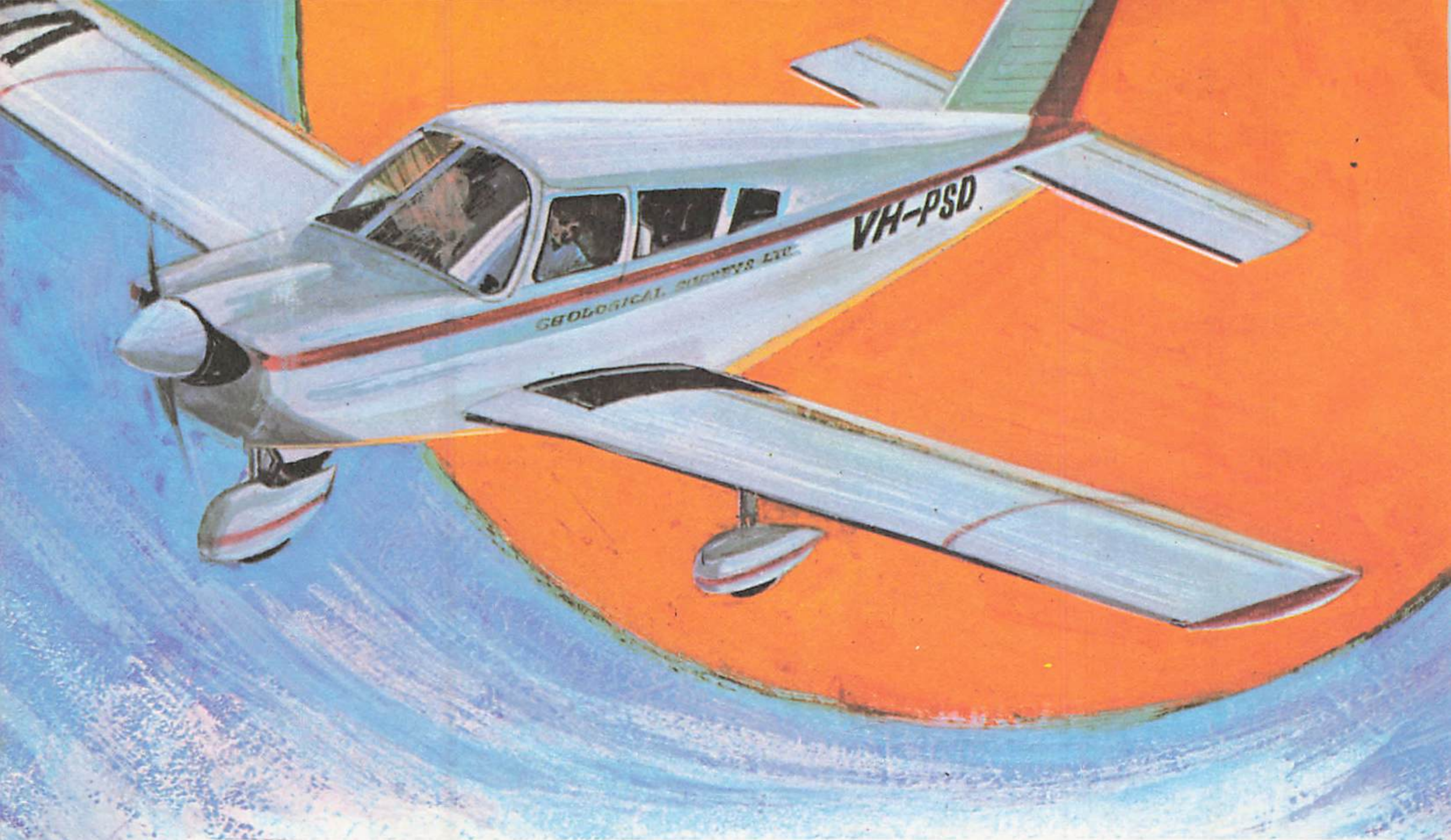


Late at night or early in the morning, Rusty would meet Bilby, the rabbit-eared bandicoot, who came scooting from his burrow under a clump of giant spinifex.

It was a very special burrow that went round and round as it went down. Every now and then Bilby had piled a heap of earth, so you could never tell just where he was. Bilby never ran far along the surface of the ground; he had several homes, and if he was afraid he just fled to the safety of another one. Like Rusty, he ate termites, but he liked to live alone.

Rusty would have laughed if he could have seen Bilby asleep, sitting back on his tail with his nose tucked down between his front paws and his ears folded *forwards* along his face. He looked very funny—but of course Bilby took care never to go to sleep in public.





Very early one morning, when Rusty had just finished a larger meal than usual, a new kind of bird flew in over the rocky mountains and landed on the flat. It was a big white bird, with red lines on its wings and numbers painted on its side; it had an engine that whined louder than a flock of parrots and it made Rusty run to hide in the first burrow he could see.

The bird would go away, he thought; but it stayed. The engine stopped whirring and two men climbed out.

The men were geologists who had come to survey the hill. Photographs taken from the air had shown a fault up there in the rocks, which might be hiding minerals. Other places, looking dustier than this, had yielded minerals and promised a fortune to those who had discovered them.

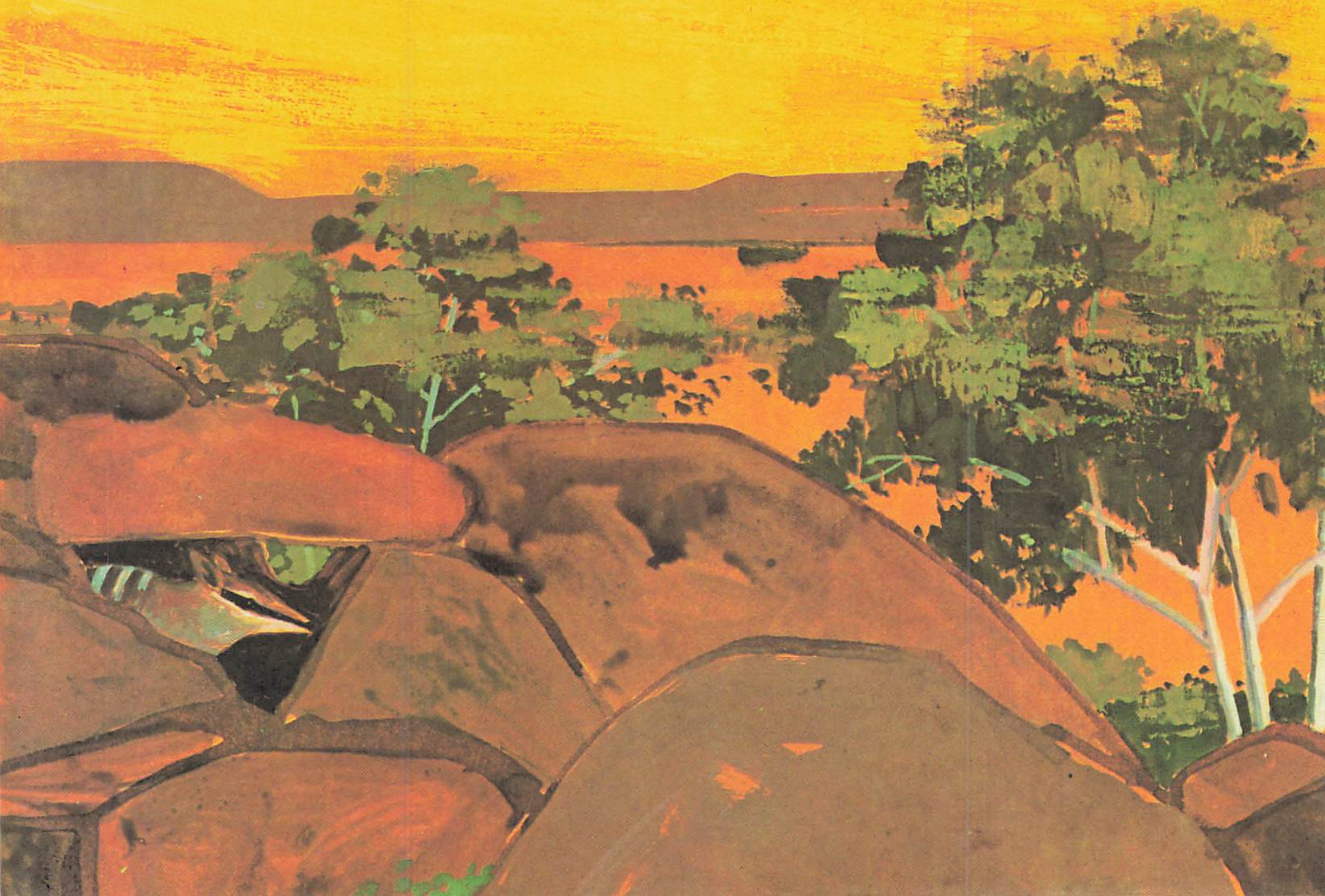
Bill and Ted had been sent to look and take back samples of the rock.

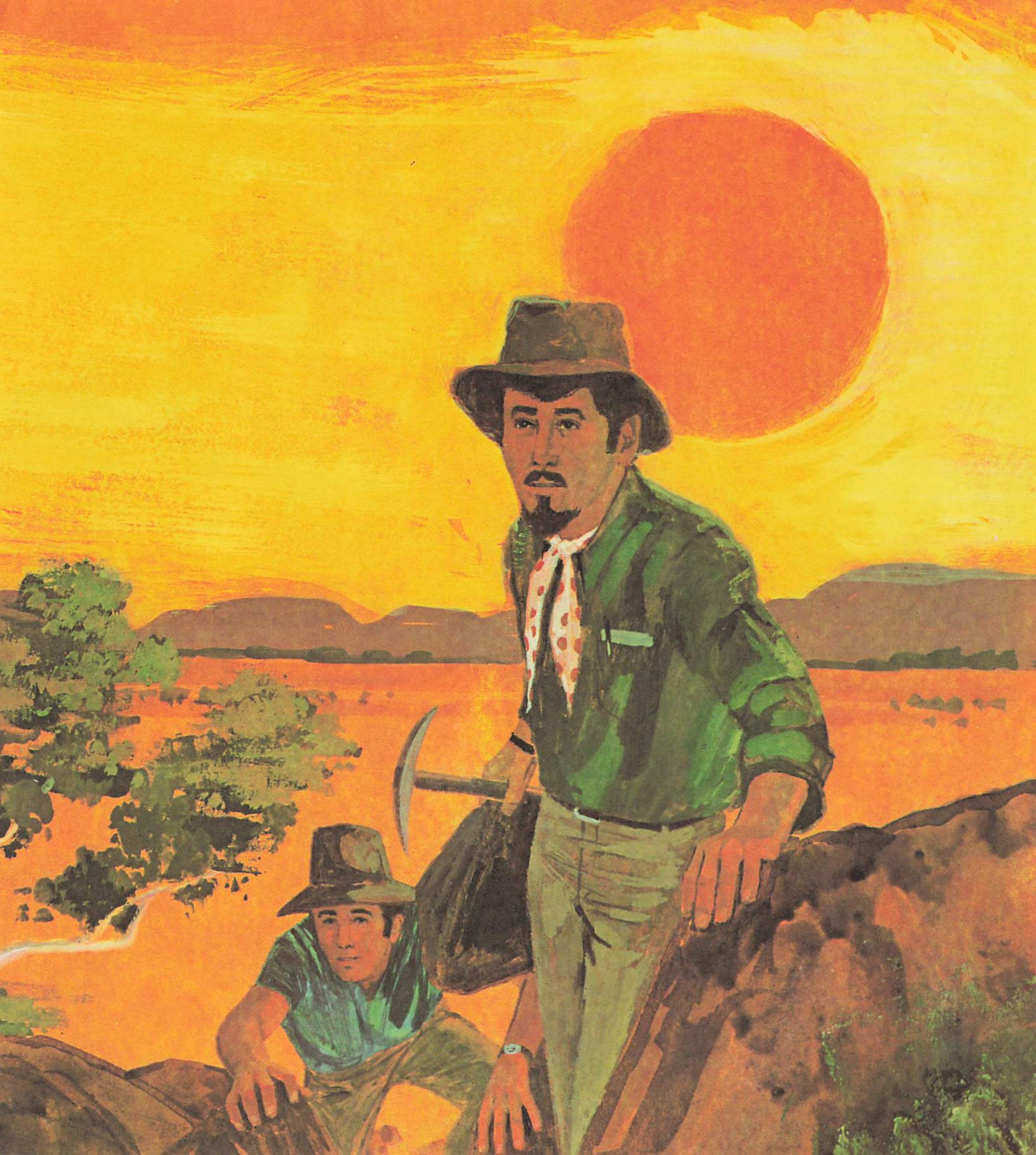
'Won't take us long,' said Ted, 'by the look of this. Just time to collect some samples and we'll be off again before tonight.'

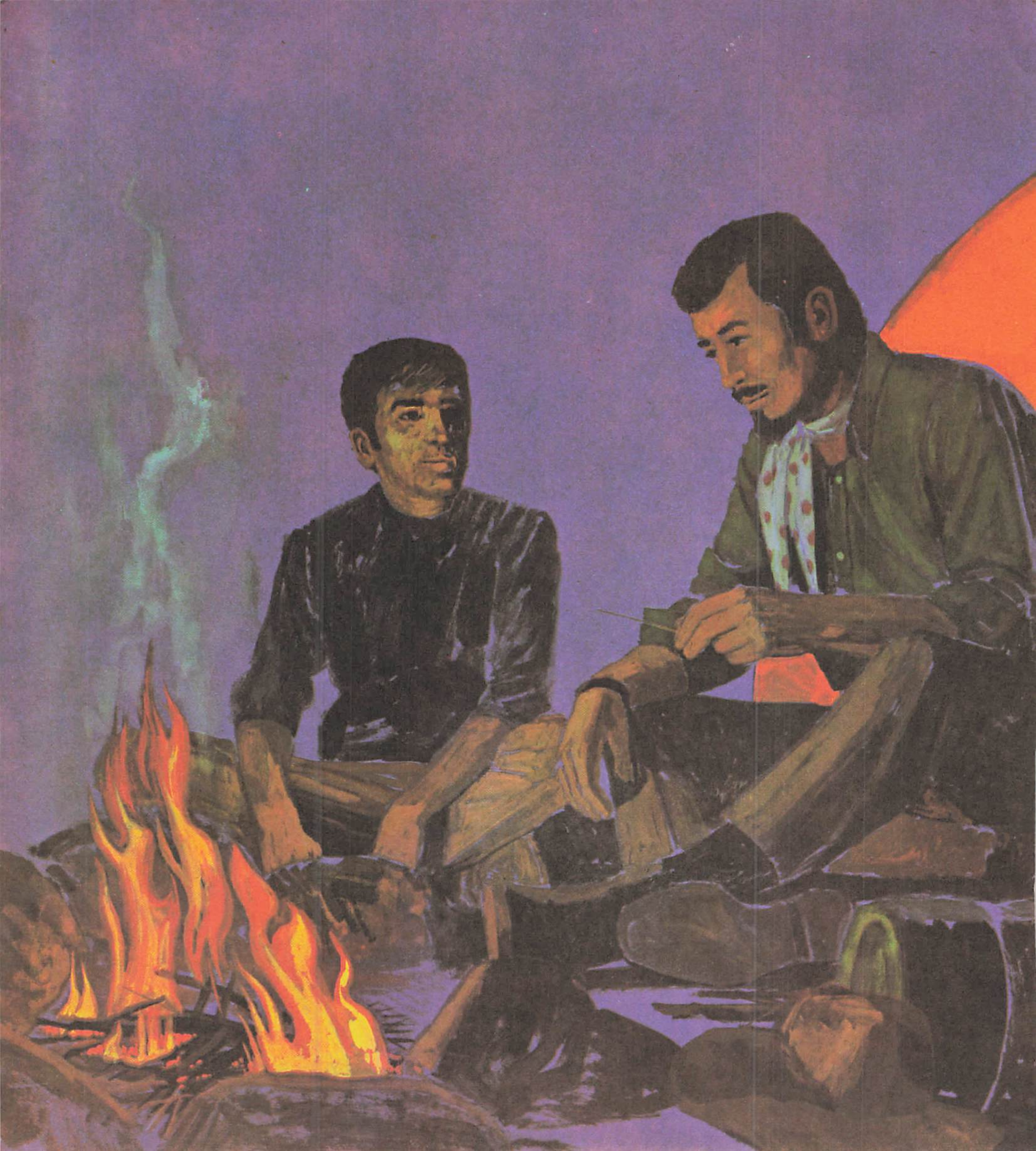
Bill set off with a sampling bag and tools, scrambling up the rocks.

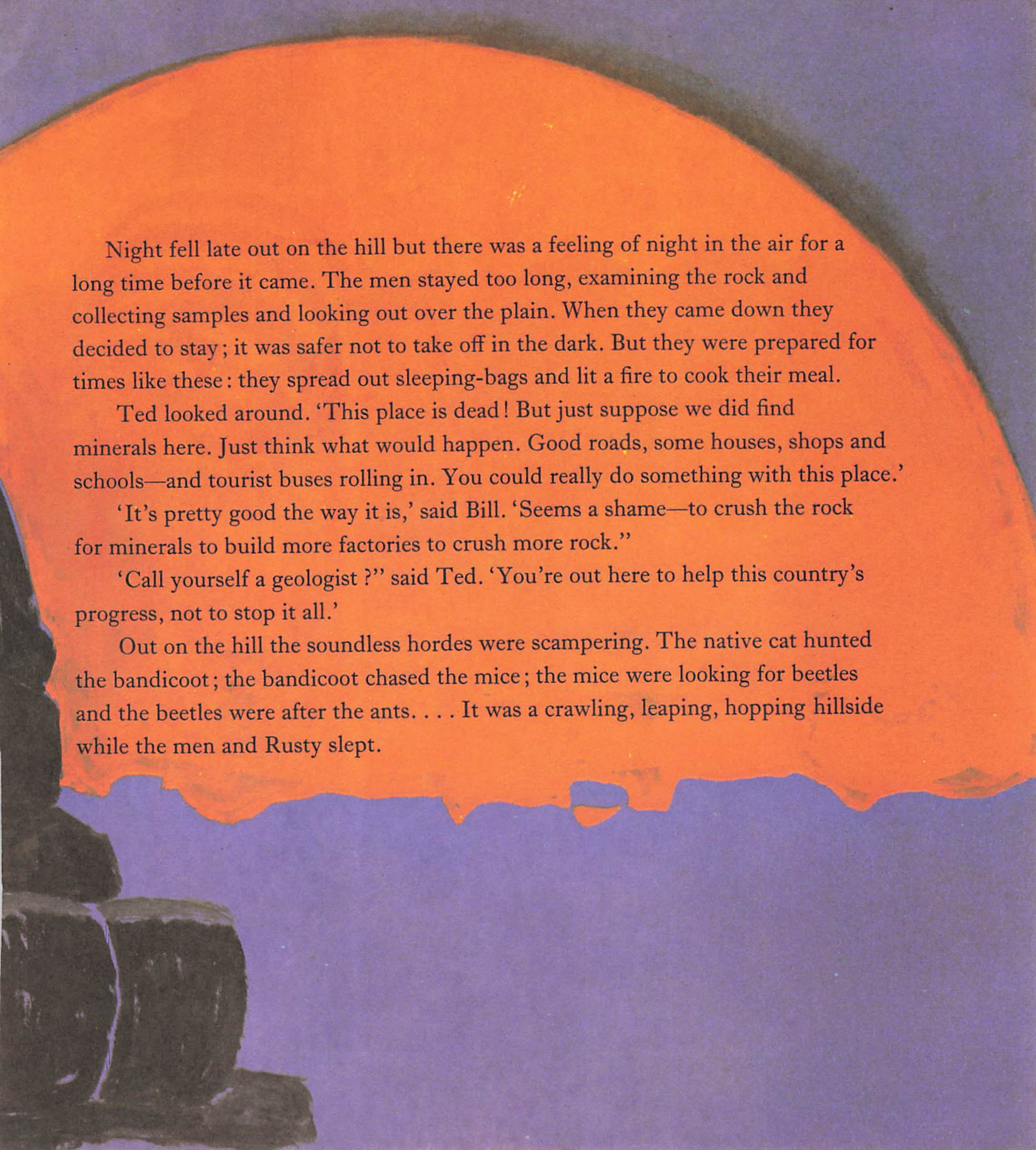
The two men went off up the ridge while Rusty hid nearby. He could hardly wait to get back to his burrow in the sand. He had never seen men before, and they looked so big.

Pitchi would be hiding now, and Bilby would have gone back to sleep. Nothing was moving on the hill. You would think nothing lived there but the grass. The teeming life of the hill stayed quiet in the presence of the men. As soon as it was safe, Rusty ran back to his burrow to sleep through the heat of the day.









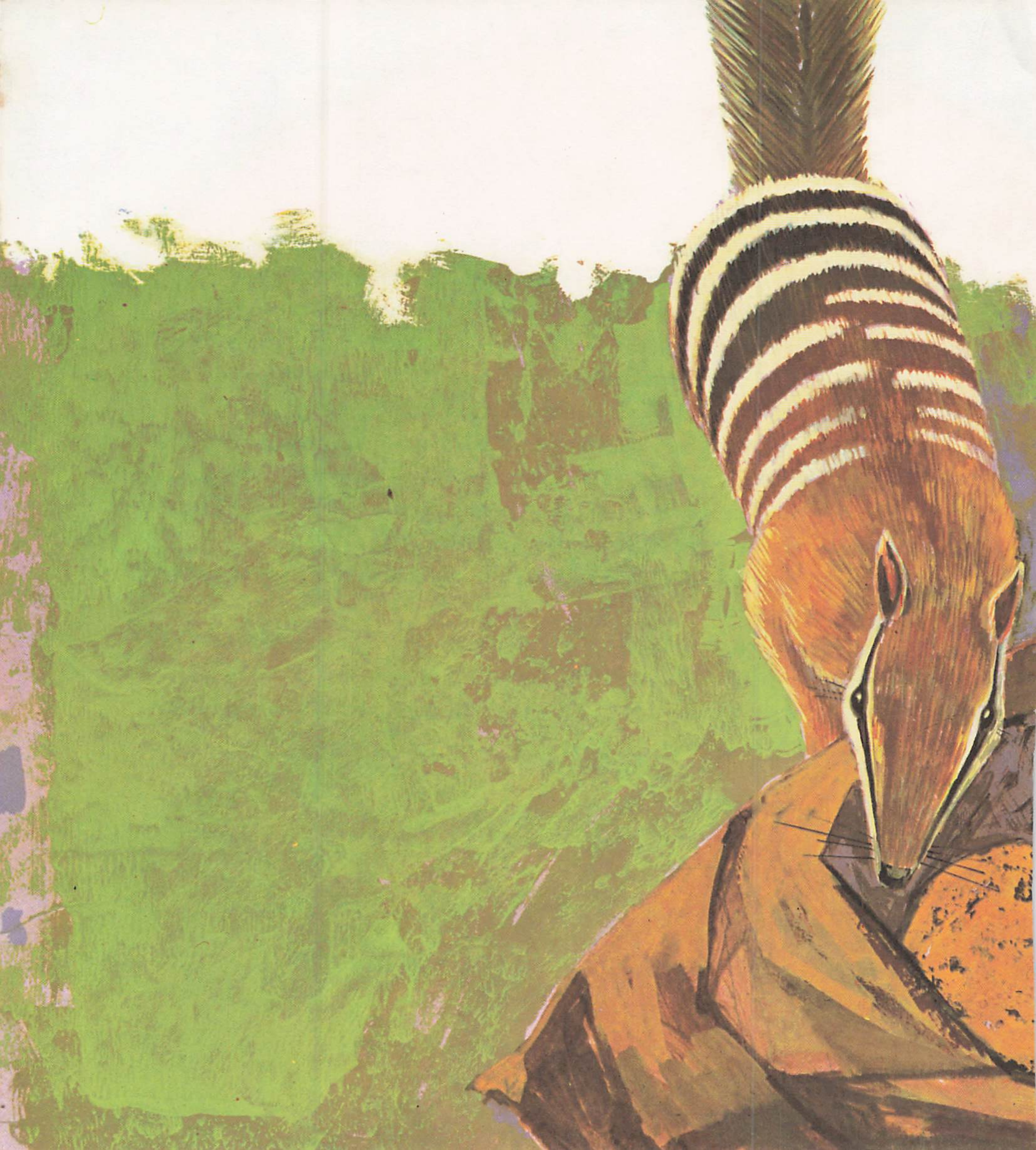
Night fell late out on the hill but there was a feeling of night in the air for a long time before it came. The men stayed too long, examining the rock and collecting samples and looking out over the plain. When they came down they decided to stay ; it was safer not to take off in the dark. But they were prepared for times like these : they spread out sleeping-bags and lit a fire to cook their meal.

Ted looked around. 'This place is dead ! But just suppose we did find minerals here. Just think what would happen. Good roads, some houses, shops and schools—and tourist buses rolling in. You could really do something with this place.'

'It's pretty good the way it is,' said Bill. 'Seems a shame—to crush the rock for minerals to build more factories to crush more rock."

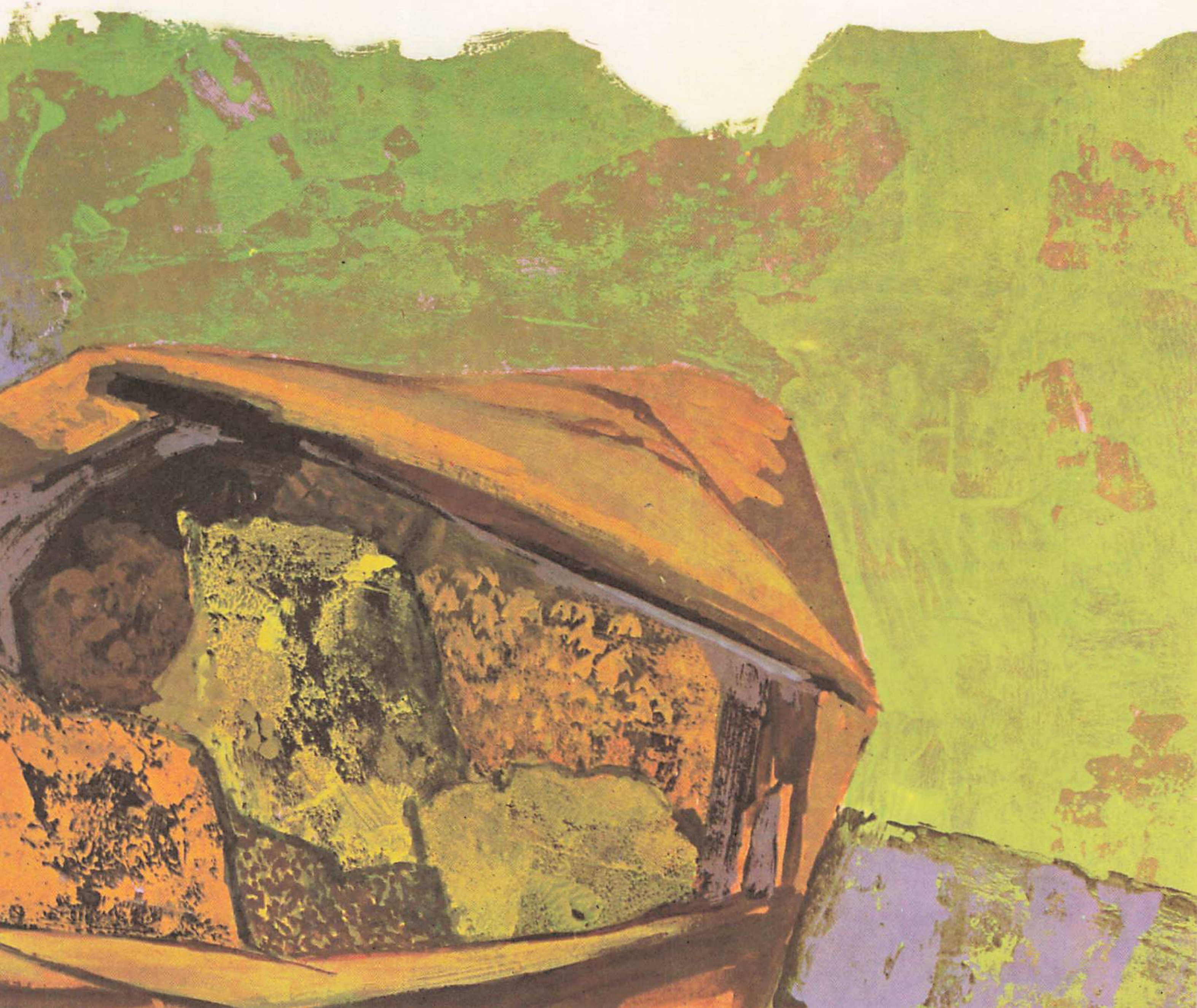
'Call yourself a geologist ?" said Ted. 'You're out here to help this country's progress, not to stop it all.'

Out on the hill the soundless hordes were scampering. The native cat hunted the bandicoot ; the bandicoot chased the mice ; the mice were looking for beetles and the beetles were after the ants. . . . It was a crawling, leaping, hopping hillside while the men and Rusty slept.



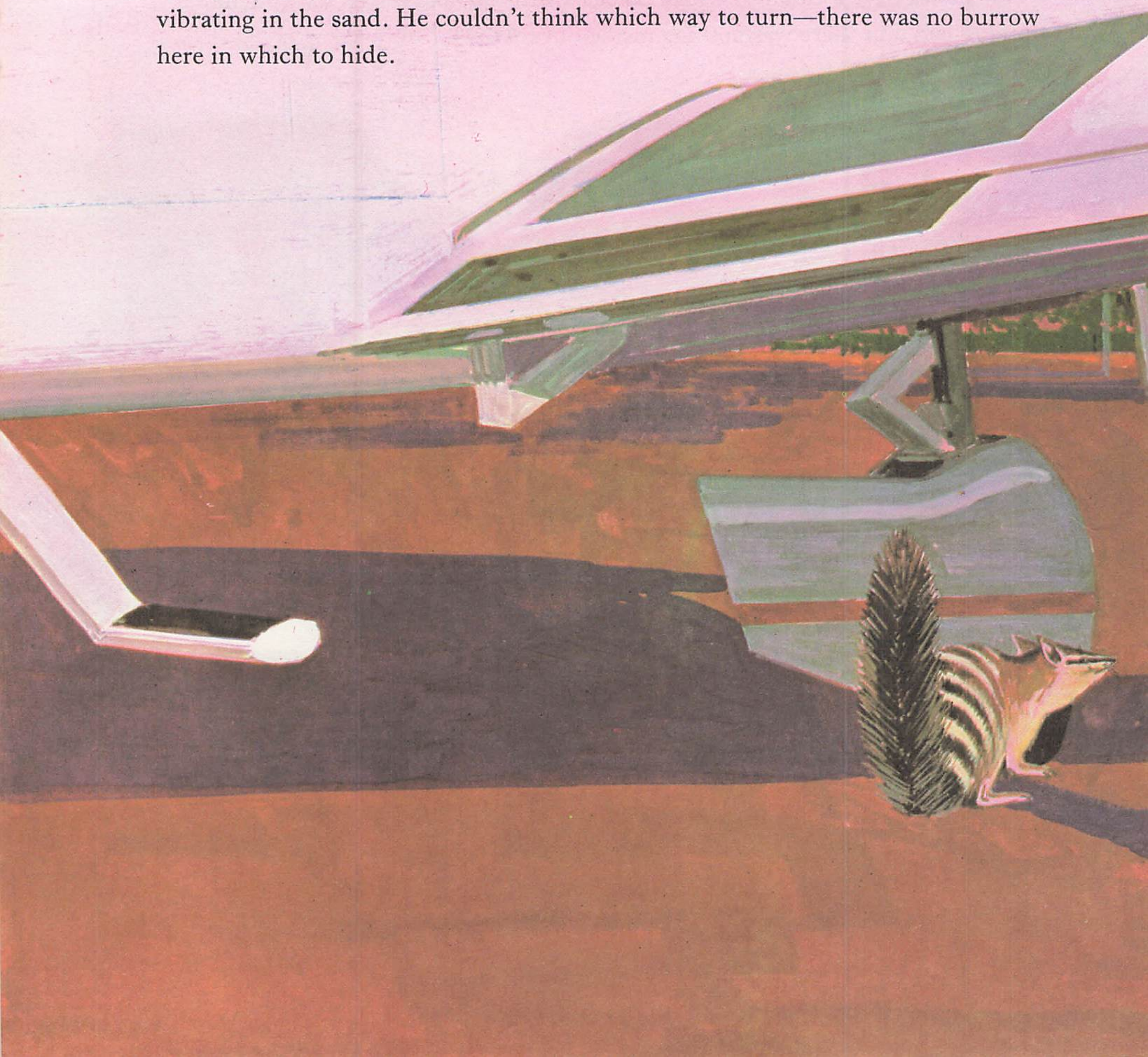
Rusty was out in the early morning, before the sun was up; no bird should disturb his meals today. But the bird was still there, its legs perched firmly on the ground. One man was still in his sleeping-bag, while the other man moved about.

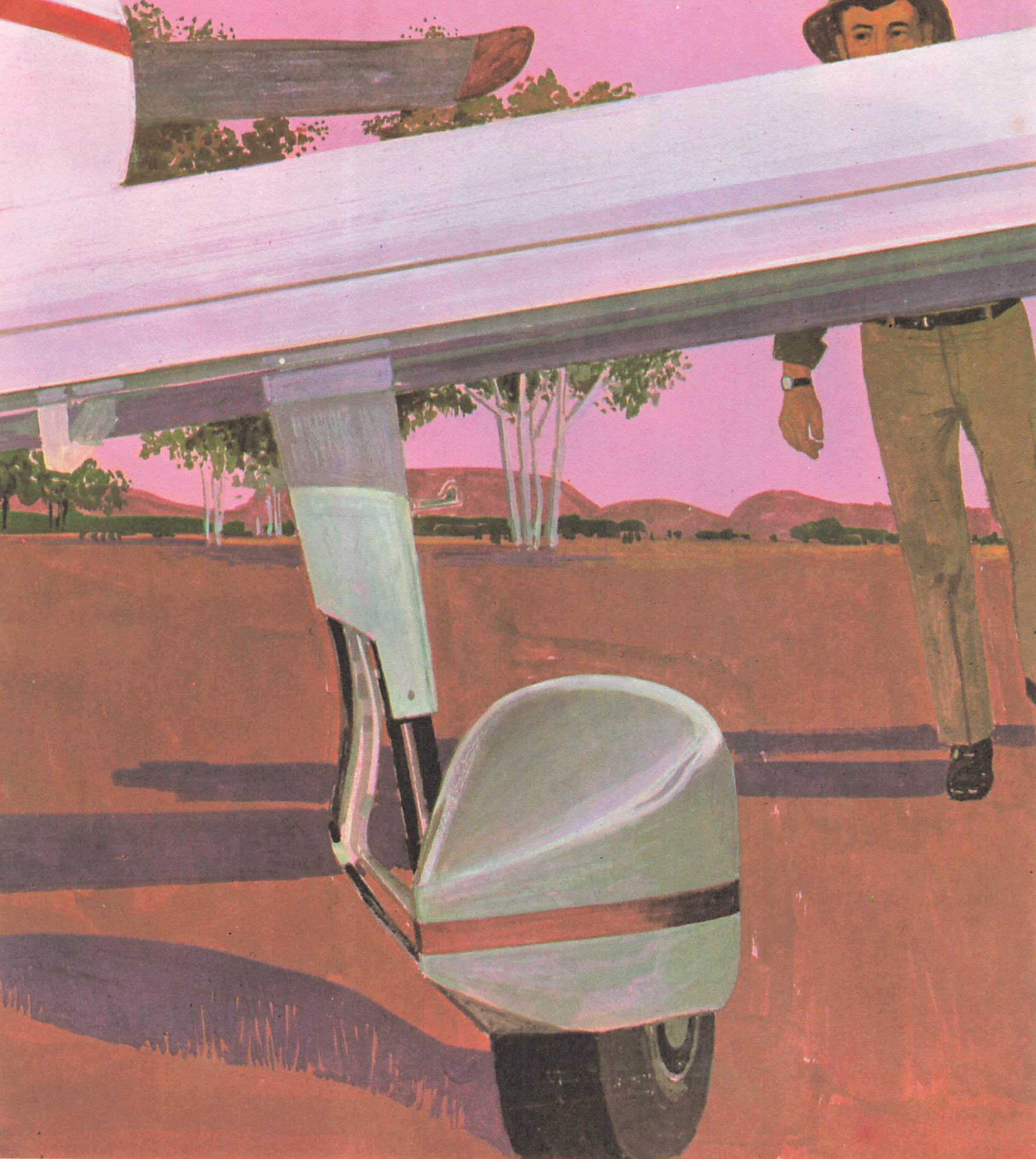
Rusty should have run to find his termites somewhere else but he was too curious not to have a closer look. He ran across the flat and poked his nose into a sampling bag, but there was nothing inside but rocks.

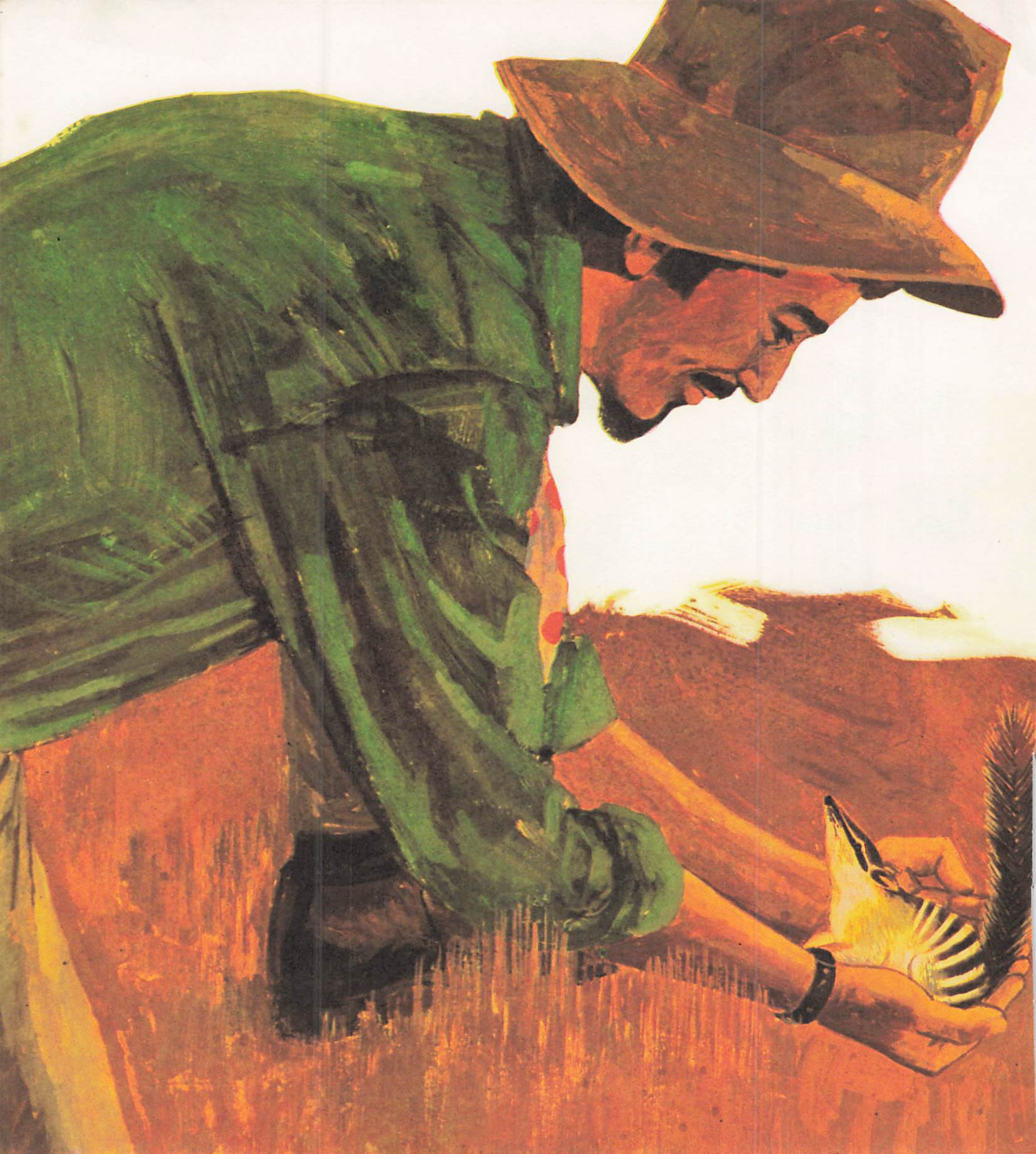


He moved closer to the wheel of the bird and peeped around it at the man, but the man had already seen him and was standing still, looking his way. It was Bill, and he was curious too.

Rusty's tail fluffed up with fright. His black eyes popped, but he stood very still. Then the man began to move—closer, closer, till Rusty felt his footsteps vibrating in the sand. He couldn't think which way to turn—there was no burrow here in which to hide.



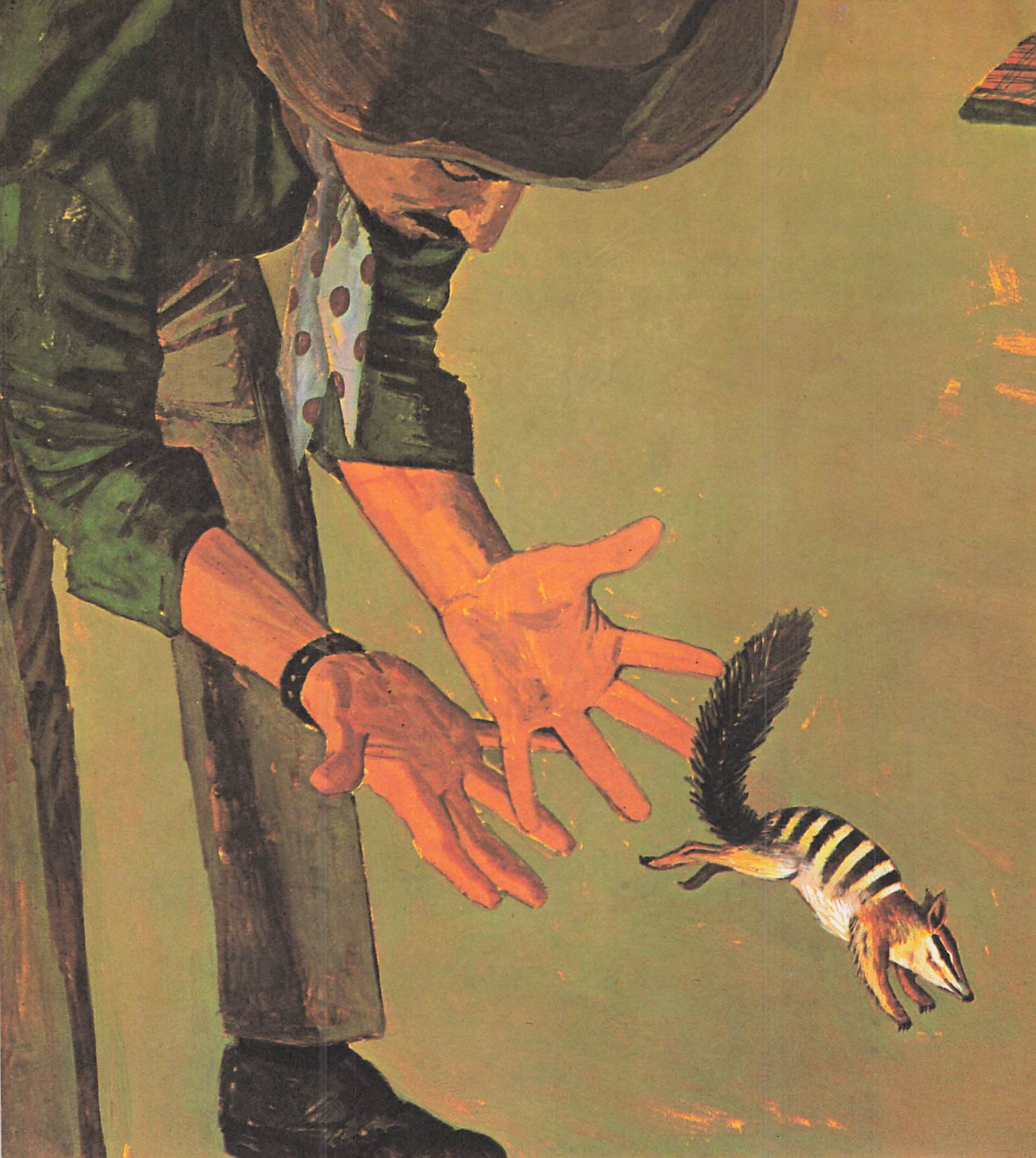


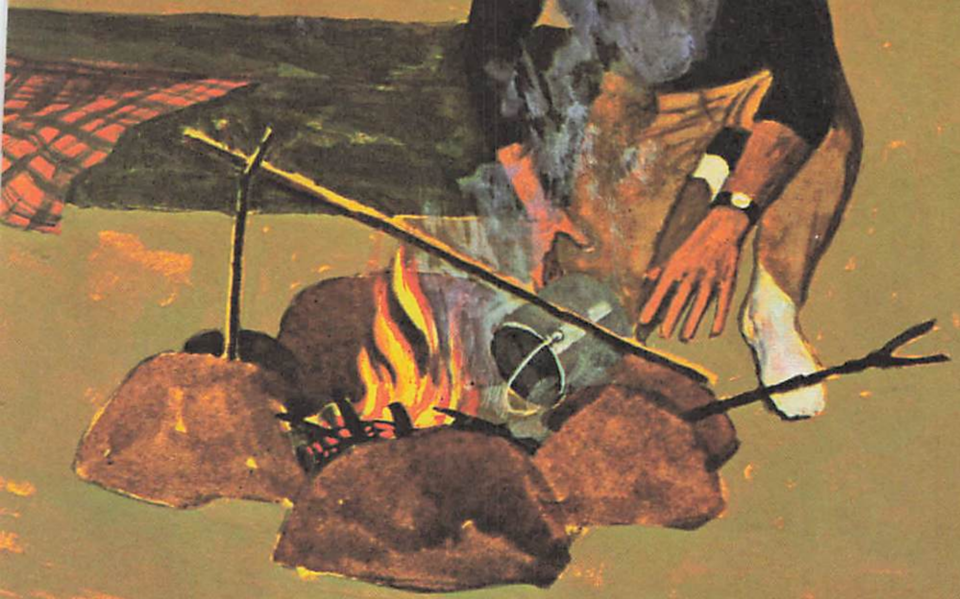


Then the man dropped down on one knee and held out his hand. Rusty didn't know why, but he didn't run. He poked his anxious nose, his quivering, curious nose, forward to investigate the hand—and found himself scooped up, and held, so that he could not get away!

Rusty did not bite or scratch the hands; he merely tried to tell the hands—with hissing noises, like the sound of water falling on a hot camp-fire—that he would prefer to be put down and allowed to run away.

'Numbat, run!' his instinct told him; but he could not move. The hands stayed gently round him.





The sun was beginning to shine on the tips of the wings; it shone on the face of Ted who was asleep on the ground. He tried to turn over and go to sleep again, but you can't do that very easily in a sleeping-bag, so he woke up and began to move, stiff from sleeping on the ground.

As he moved he knocked over the billy, which fell with a clatter on the stones piled up around the fire. HISS! Steam rose from the stones. But Rusty had stopped his hissing sounds. At the first clatter Bill had relaxed his grasp and Rusty leaped for the ground. 'Numbat, run!' his instinct shouted. He was free!

Now he could run—away up the hill to his burrow. He was gone before Ted could even see what Bill had been holding in his hand.

Saturday April 26 AM
location Conrad Canyon S.A.
Outcrop sparse - possibility
of one at this time negative

'Ted!' gasped Bill. 'Did you see that ? I think I had a numbat in my hands.'

'A what ?'

'A numbat. Banded anteater. Didn't you see his stripes ? There are numbats in the forests in the West, but not here in the desert. And this one was special. A rusty one. No-one's seen one of those for twenty years!'

'Well,' said Ted, rubbing his beard. 'Numbats eh ? I must get up.'

'But a numbat, here!' said Bill. 'And a rusty one at that. If only I could be sure. If I'd had a camera—but he was too quick. Perhaps I could sketch him and take *that* back . . .'

But Ted was gathering up the bags. 'We haven't got time for that. We're a day behind already. And what about our report ? We'll never get another job like this if we delay on this one.'

'But a rusty numbat! Don't you realise ? This is news.'

'News!' Ted exploded. 'Look, Bill, I'm interested too; but there are people in the city, even overseas, waiting for our report. Shares on the Stock Exchange rise and fall on the basis of these reports. Money is changing hands across the world. People have fortunes to invest. We can't sit here sketching animals while they're waiting for our news.'

'But if we could only catch him, even make sure *what* he is, then *that* news could be important to the world.'

'That may be so,' Ted argued, 'but in this modern world people just aren't as interested in finding lost animals as they are in making fortunes.'

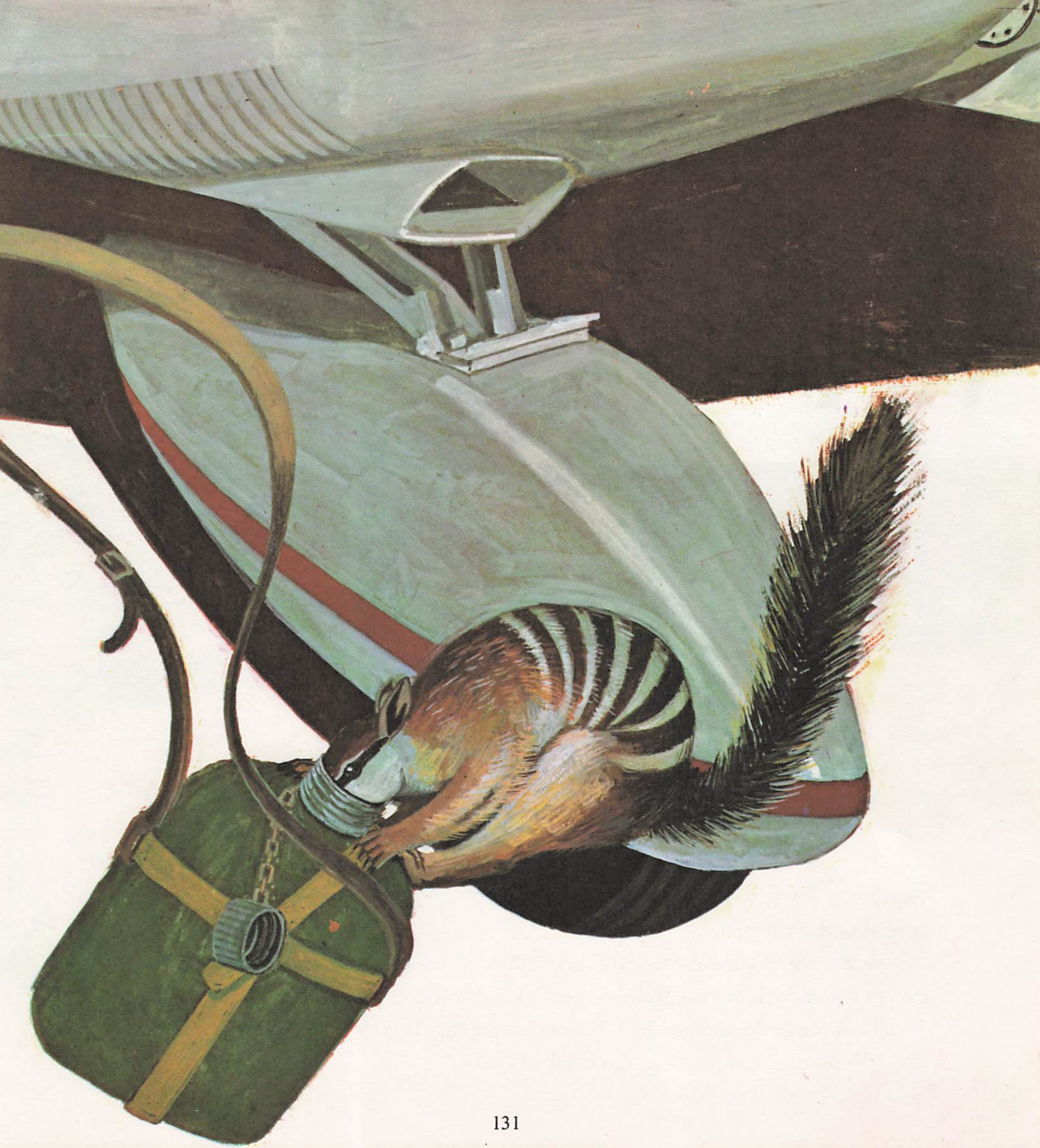
Bill was growing angry now. 'Then they should be. It's a pity people like you wouldn't stop for a moment and realise there are treasures in Australia that can't be bought by money!'

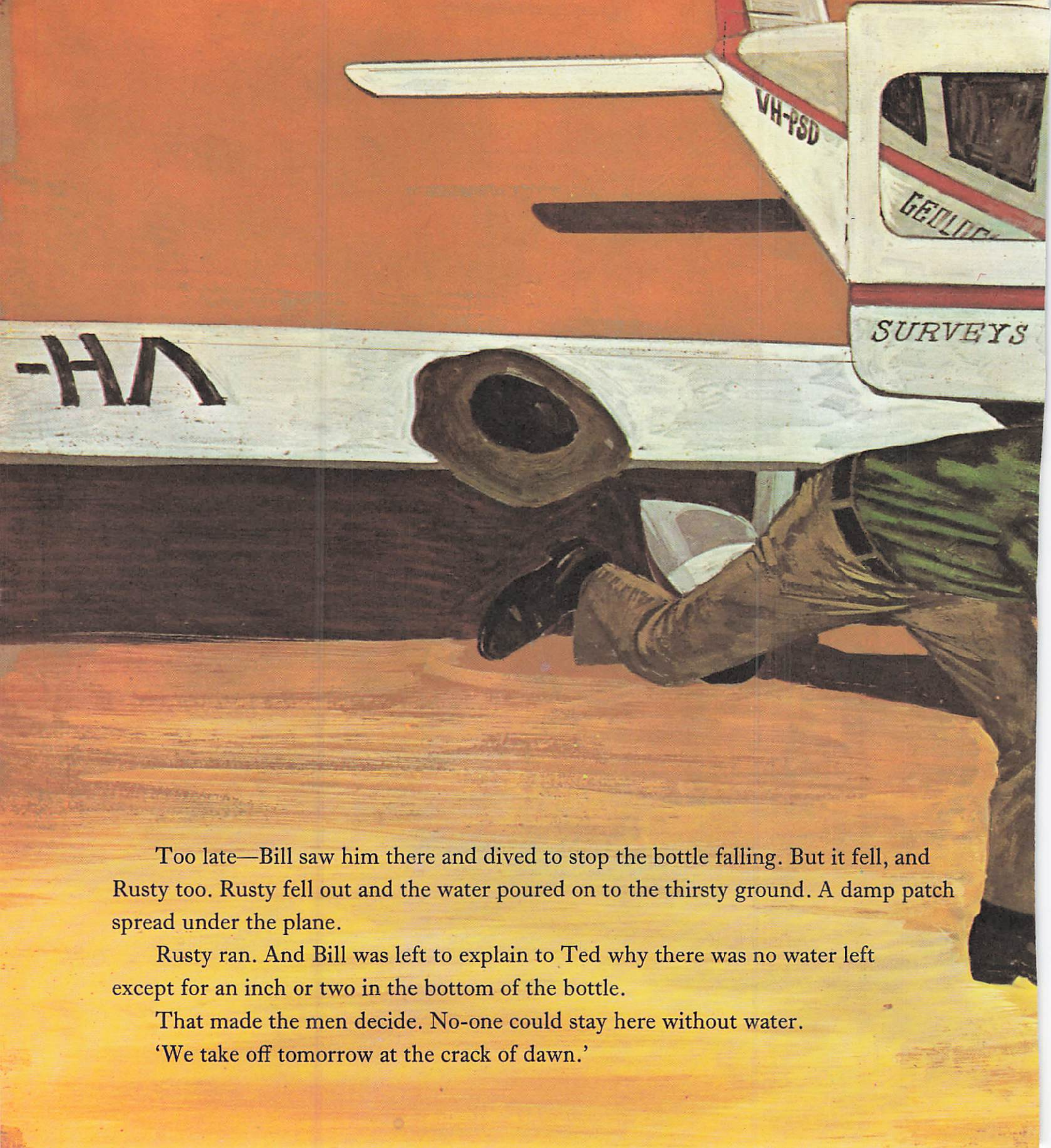
Ted knew when he was beaten. 'Very well, we'll stay another day. I'll collect more samples, and you can go looking for this—numbat thing.'

That afternoon, Ted was working up on the rocks. Bill went looking for Rusty's hole. He found so many holes that might be burrows—which one could be Rusty's ? He went back to writing his report and sketching numbats in between.

When the sun was going down and the air was growing cool, Rusty came out of his hole and went down on the flat to investigate the great bird, which was still standing there.

The bottle of water stood under the plane; its lid was almost off. Rusty was too curious. He poked his snout into the hole, kicked off from the ground, and found his head was stuck. He scratched at the bottle and waved his legs in the air.



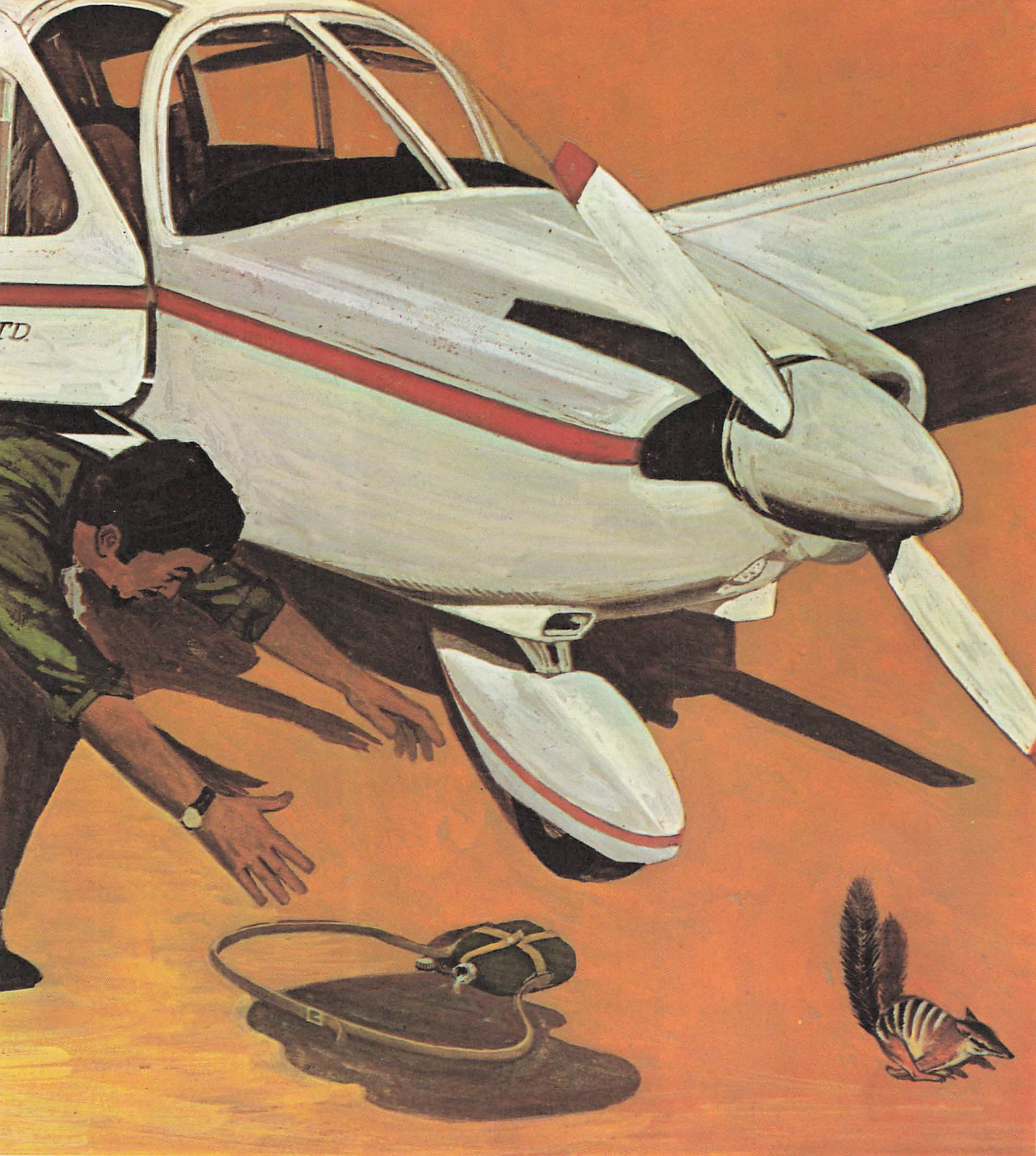


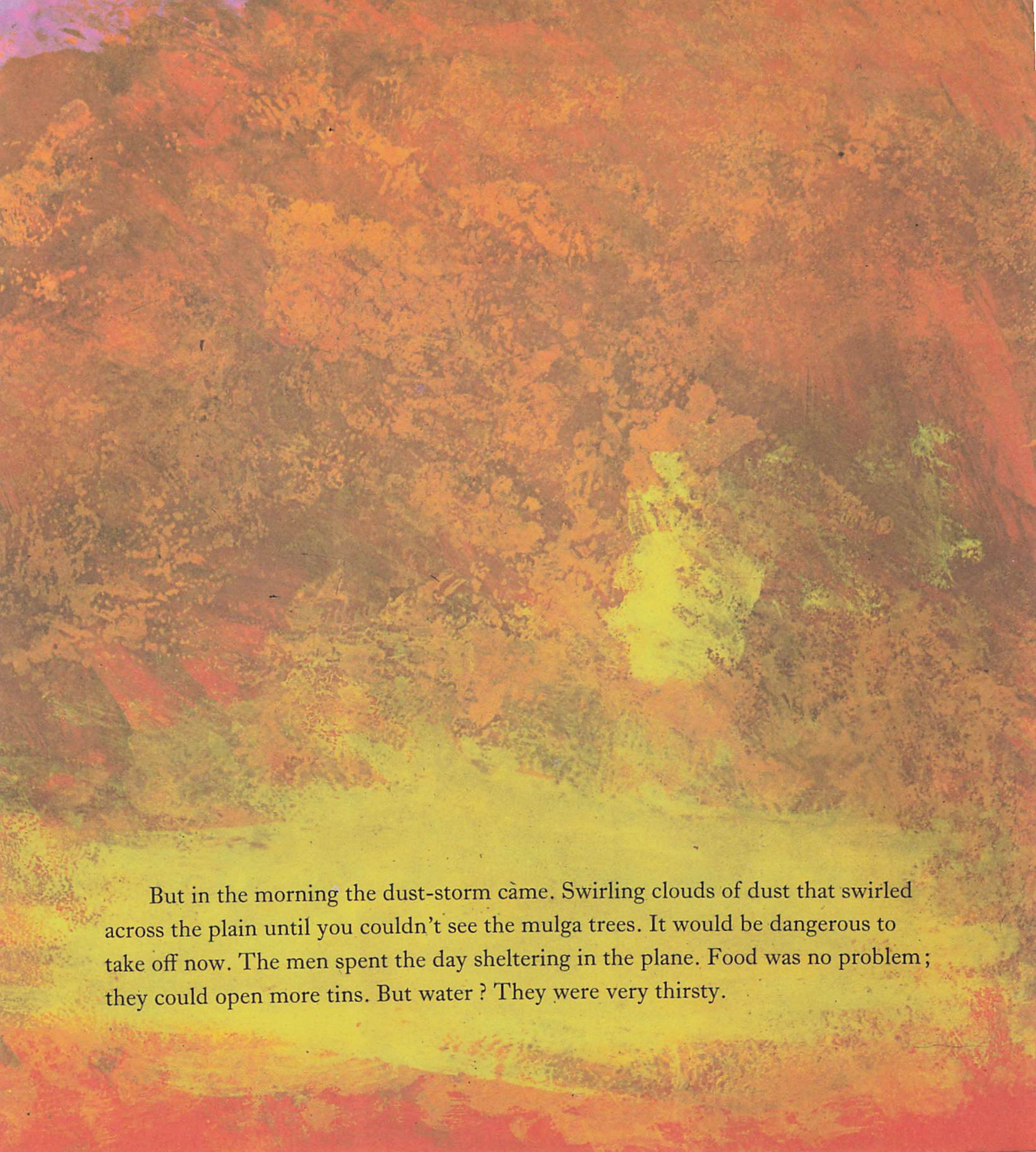
Too late—Bill saw him there and dived to stop the bottle falling. But it fell, and Rusty too. Rusty fell out and the water poured on to the thirsty ground. A damp patch spread under the plane.

Rusty ran. And Bill was left to explain to Ted why there was no water left except for an inch or two in the bottom of the bottle.

That made the men decide. No-one could stay here without water.

'We take off tomorrow at the crack of dawn.'

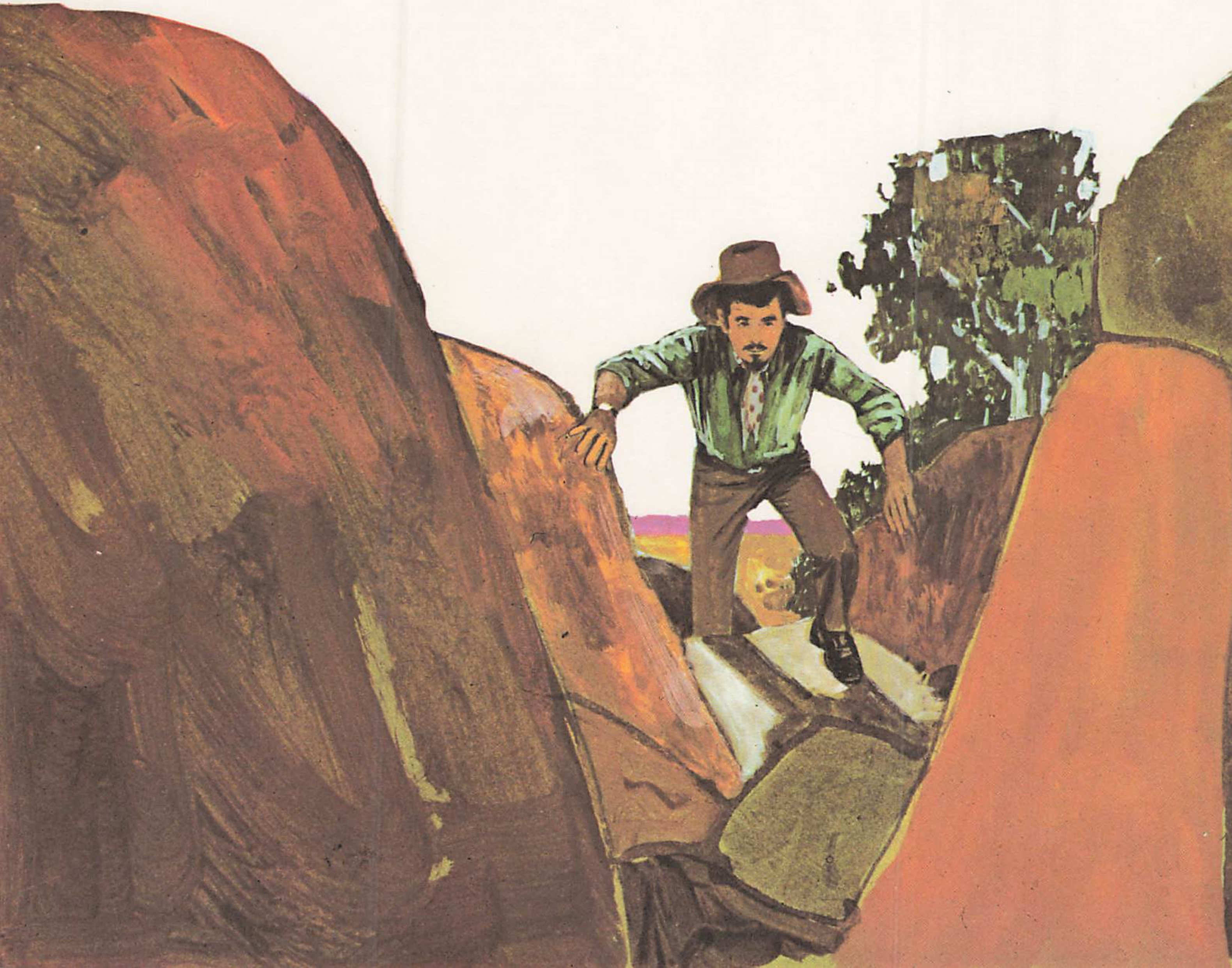

TD.

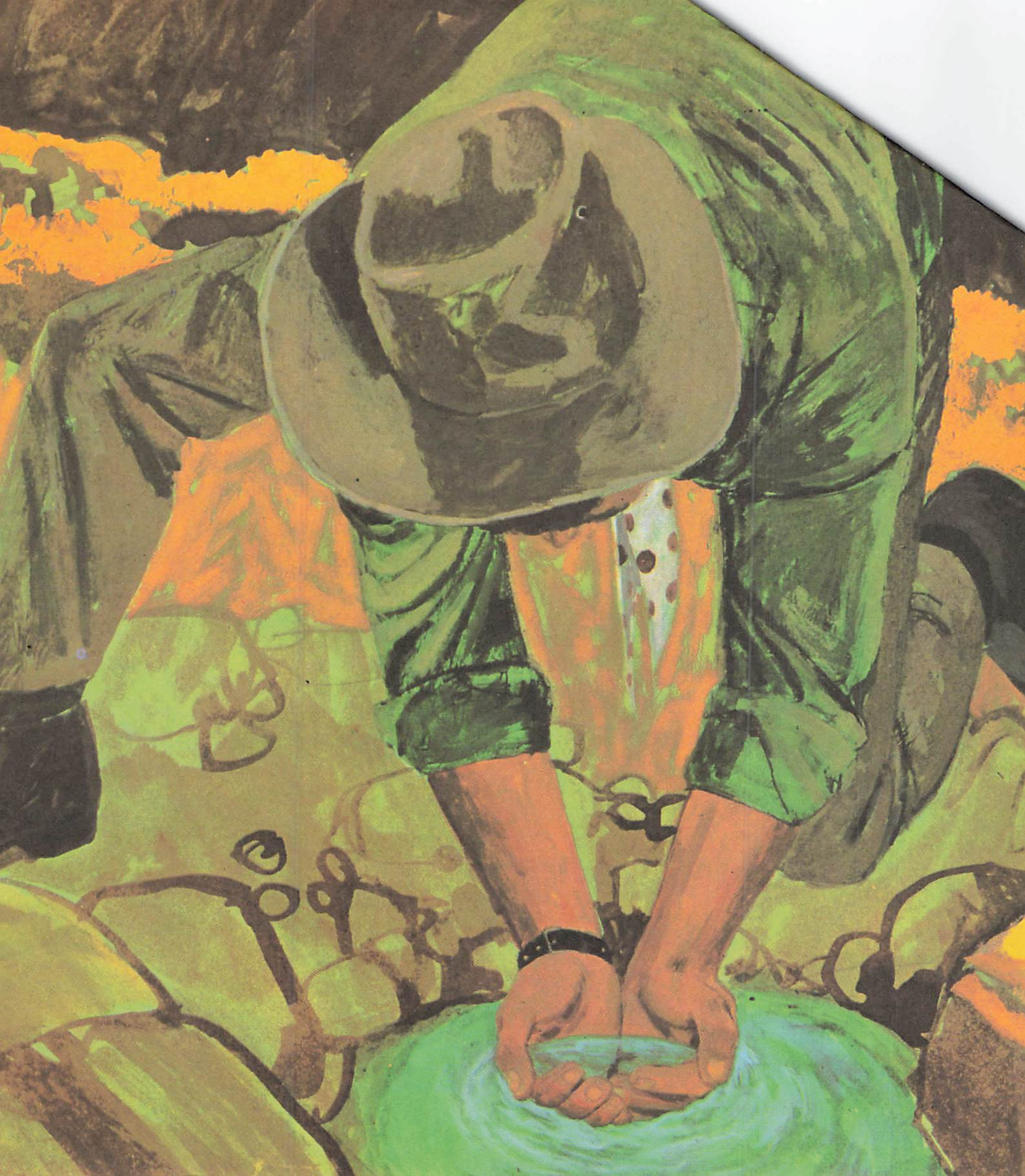


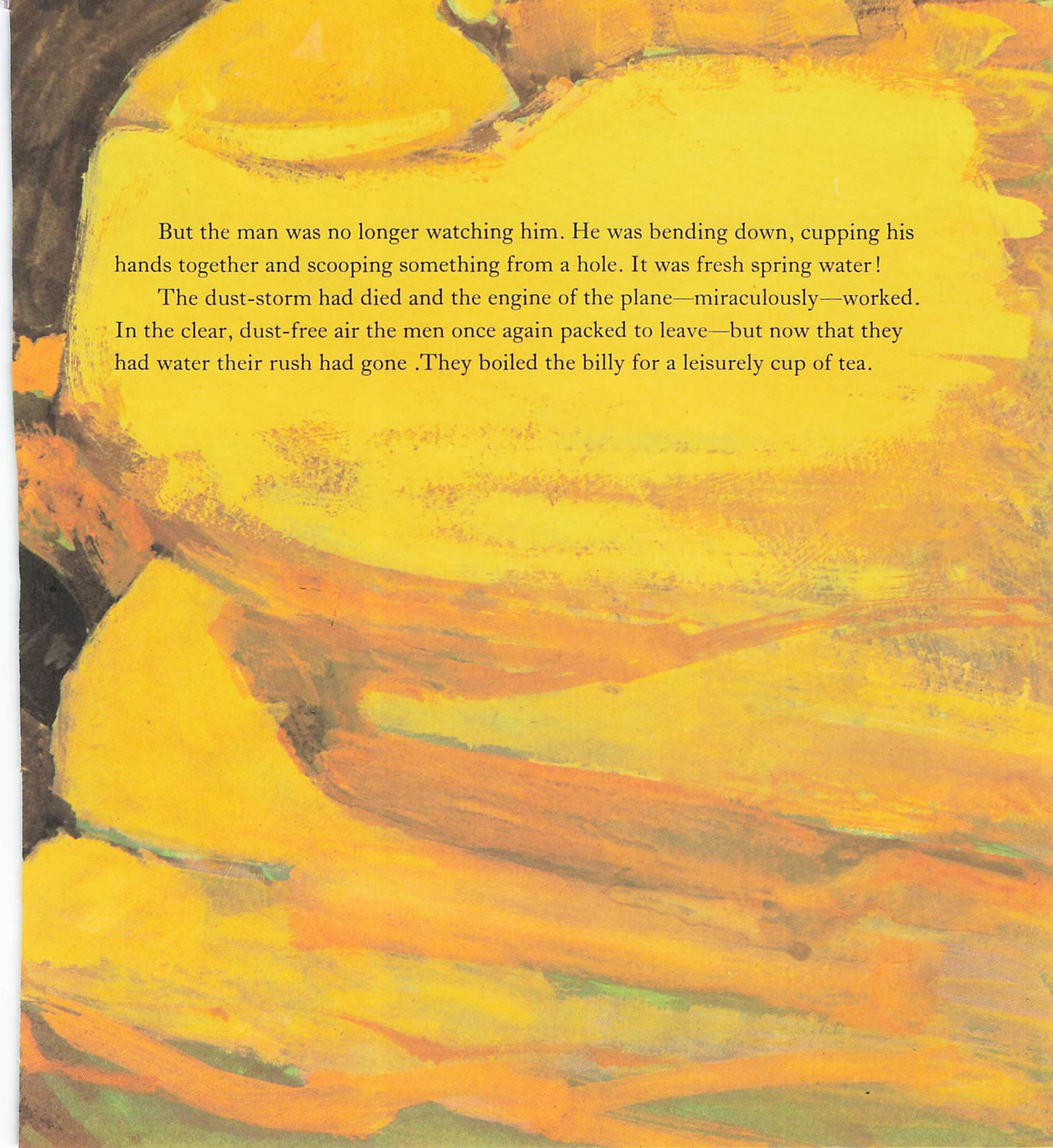
But in the morning the dust-storm came. Swirling clouds of dust that swirled across the plain until you couldn't see the mulga trees. It would be dangerous to take off now. The men spent the day sheltering in the plane. Food was no problem; they could open more tins. But water? They were very thirsty.

In the late afternoon Rusty came out of his burrow. Hunger was more important than dust. He went down on the flat and scratched around the plane.

Then he saw the man come out, the one who had held him the day before. Rusty ran. But the man ran too, chasing after him up the slope. Rusty passed his burrow and ran for the rocks; one of the holes up there would do. Over the rocks Rusty leaped and the man scrambled. Then Rusty squeezed panting through a hole in the rocks where he knew he was safe, and from where he could watch the man.



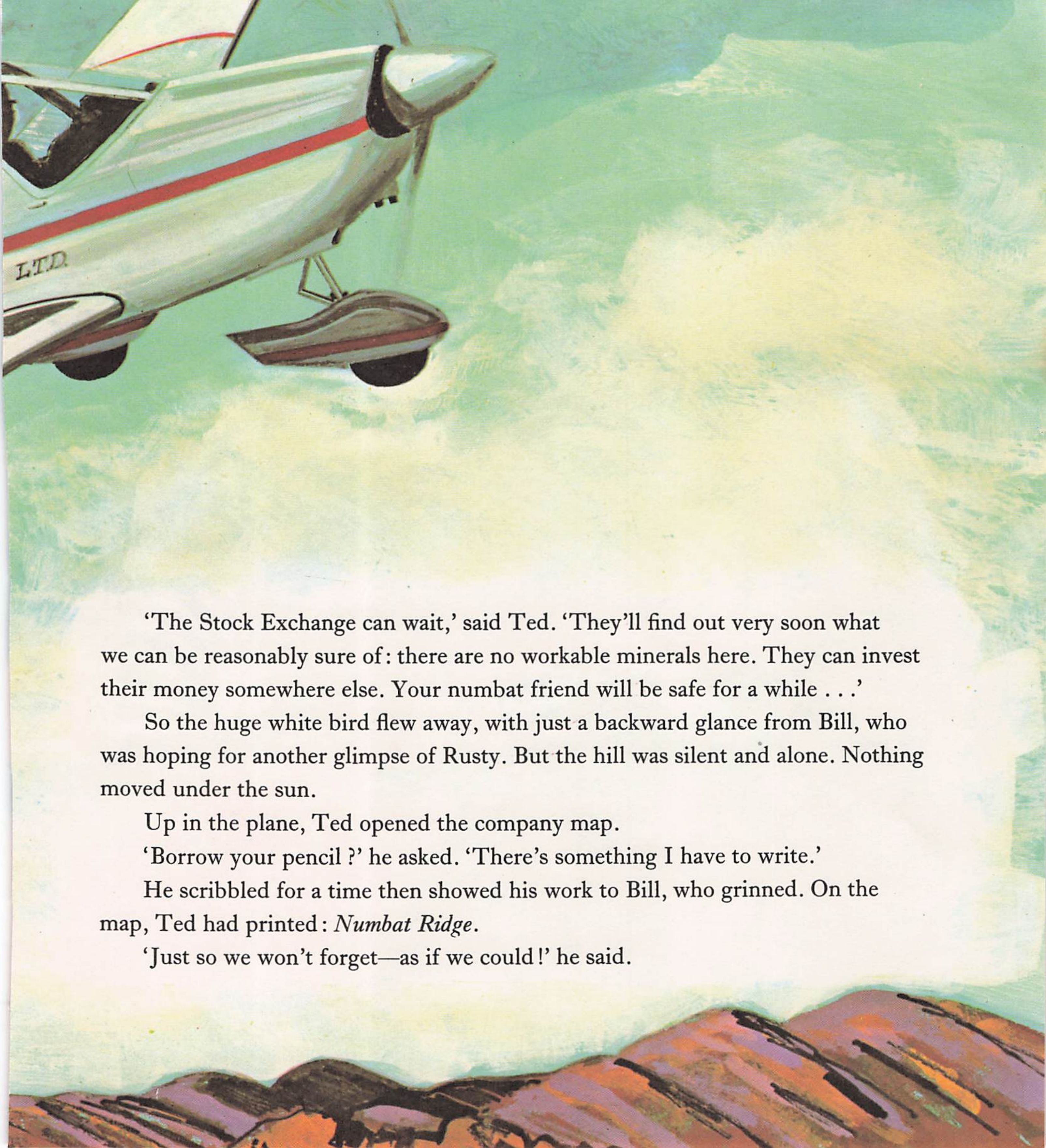




But the man was no longer watching him. He was bending down, cupping his hands together and scooping something from a hole. It was fresh spring water!

The dust-storm had died and the engine of the plane—miraculously—worked. In the clear, dust-free air the men once again packed to leave—but now that they had water their rush had gone .They boiled the billy for a leisurely cup of tea.

GEOLOGICAL SURVEYS
VH-PSD
VH-PSD



'The Stock Exchange can wait,' said Ted. 'They'll find out very soon what we can be reasonably sure of: there are no workable minerals here. They can invest their money somewhere else. Your numbat friend will be safe for a while . . .'

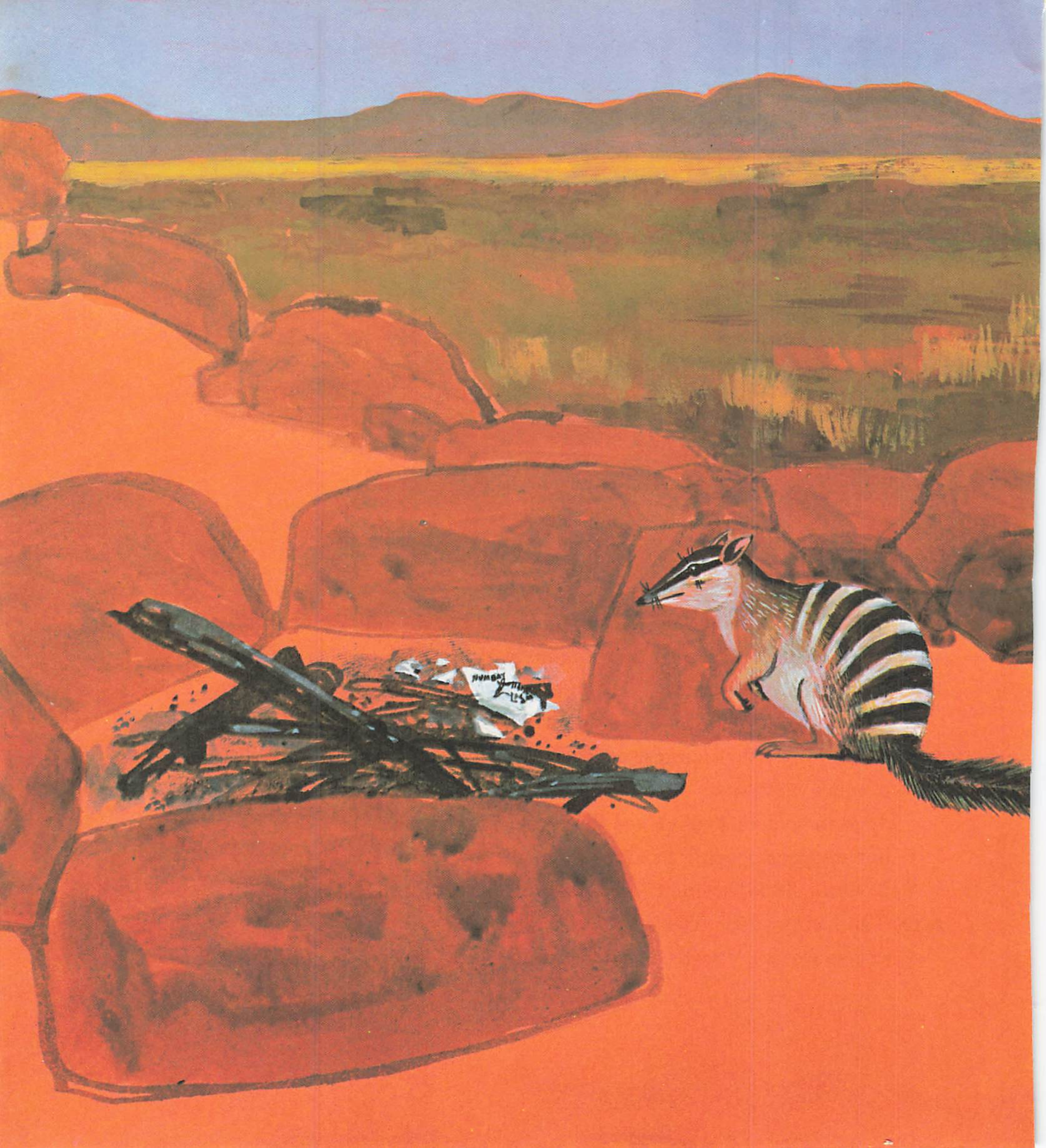
So the huge white bird flew away, with just a backward glance from Bill, who was hoping for another glimpse of Rusty. But the hill was silent and alone. Nothing moved under the sun.

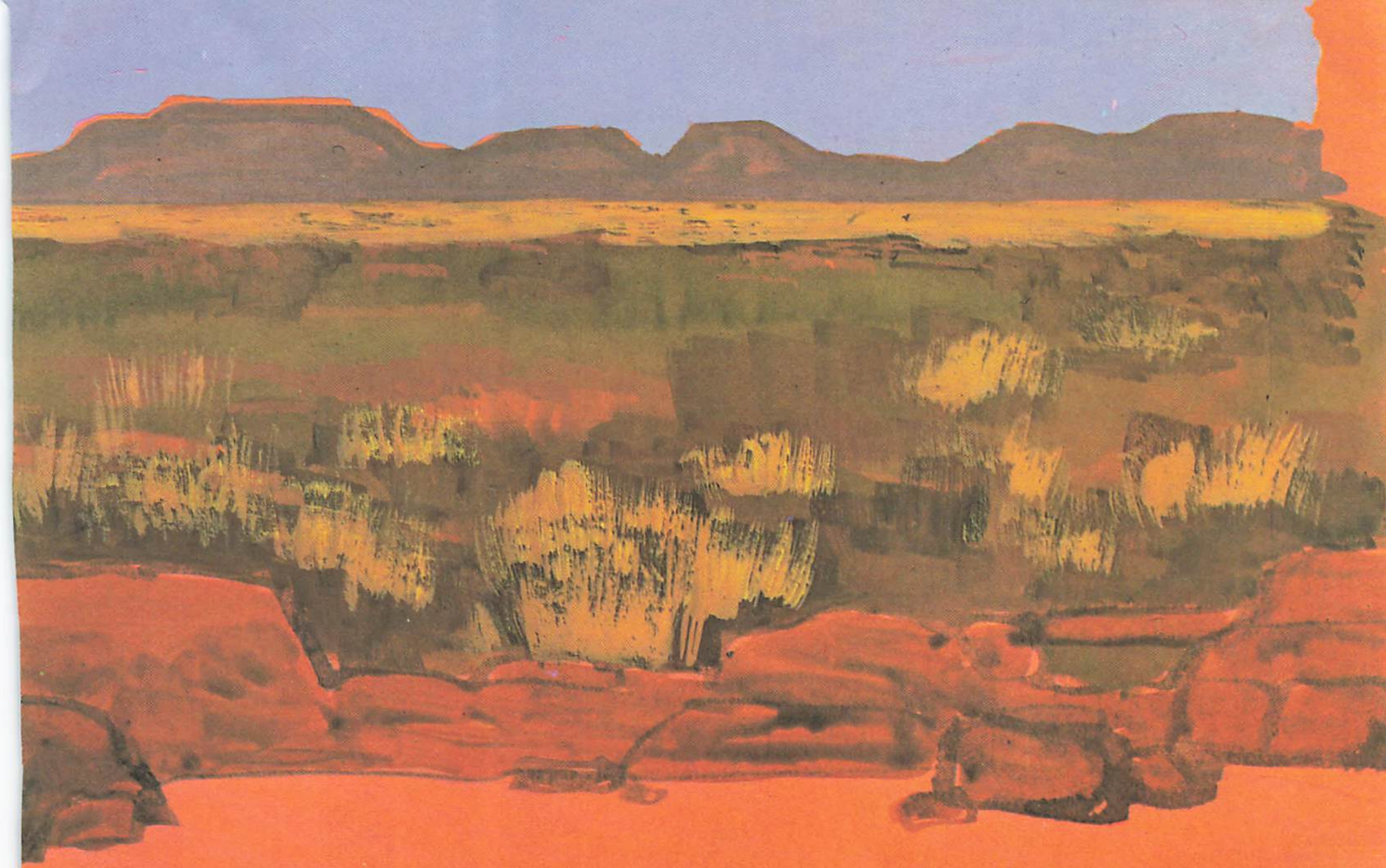
Up in the plane, Ted opened the company map.

'Borrow your pencil ?' he asked. 'There's something I have to write.'

He scribbled for a time then showed his work to Bill, who grinned. On the map, Ted had printed: *Numbat Ridge*.

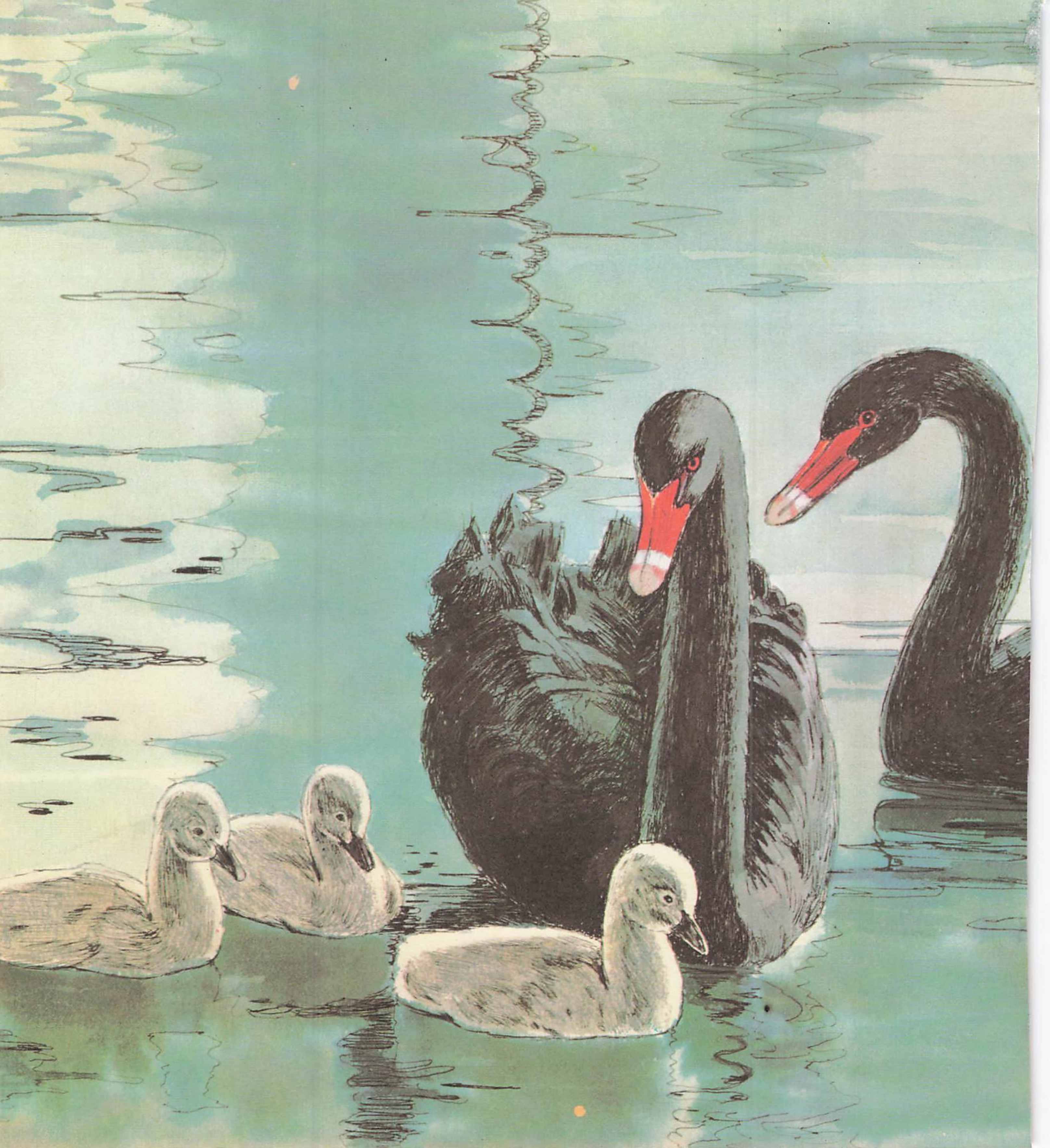
'Just so we won't forget—as if we could !' he said.

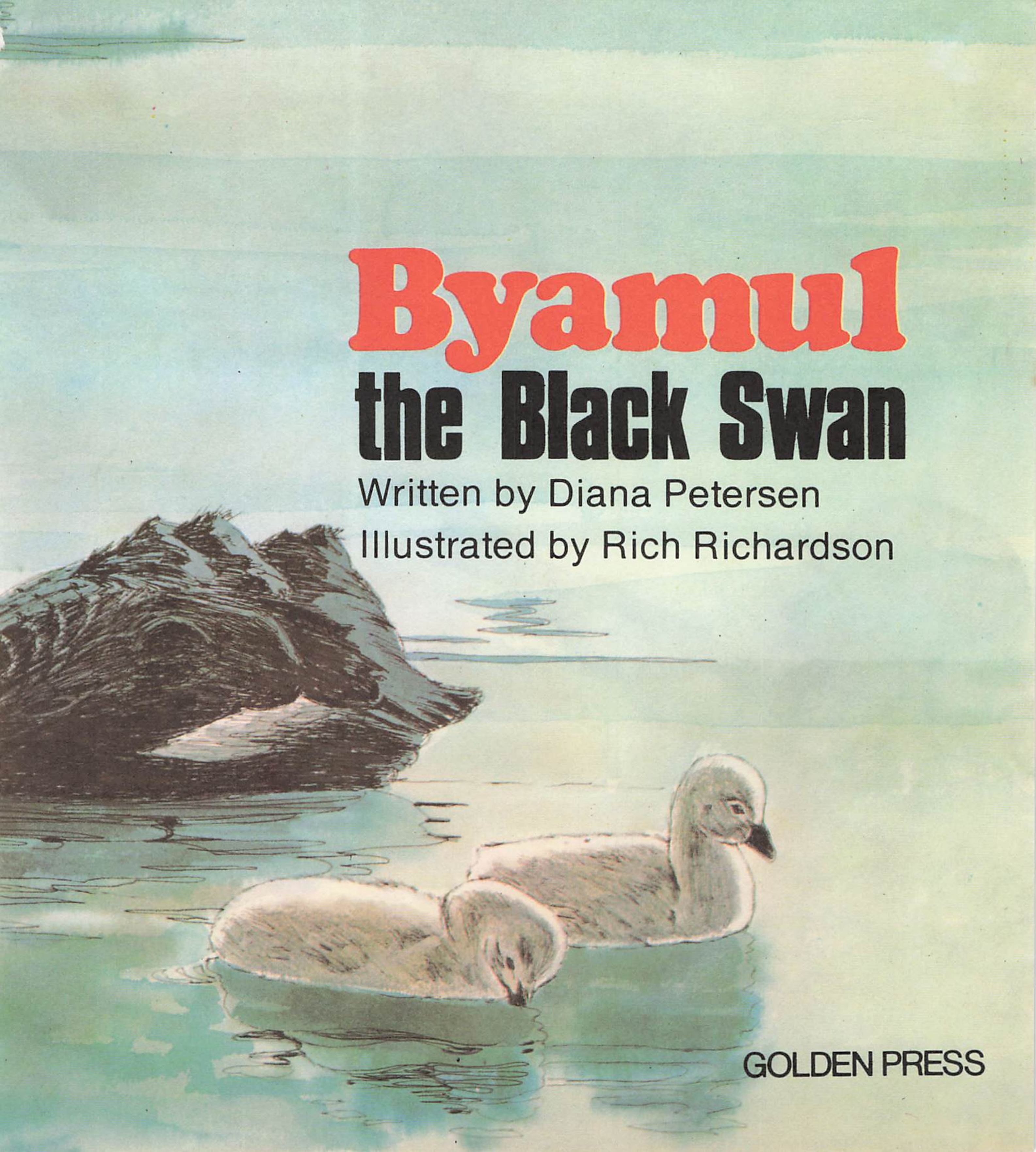

NUMBAT
LISA



Down on the ground, Rusty came out to feed. The bird was gone and his playground was free. But Rusty had no time to play. He had the remains of a fire to investigate.

NO-ONE REALLY KNOWS THE HABITS OF THE 'RUSTY' NUMBAT, BECAUSE NO-ONE HAS SEEN ONE FOR TWENTY YEARS. LET US HOPE THAT ONE DAY 'RUSTY' WILL BE FOUND AGAIN, PERHAPS BY SOMEONE LIKE BILL OR TED, OR BY SOMEONE LIKE YOU. . . .

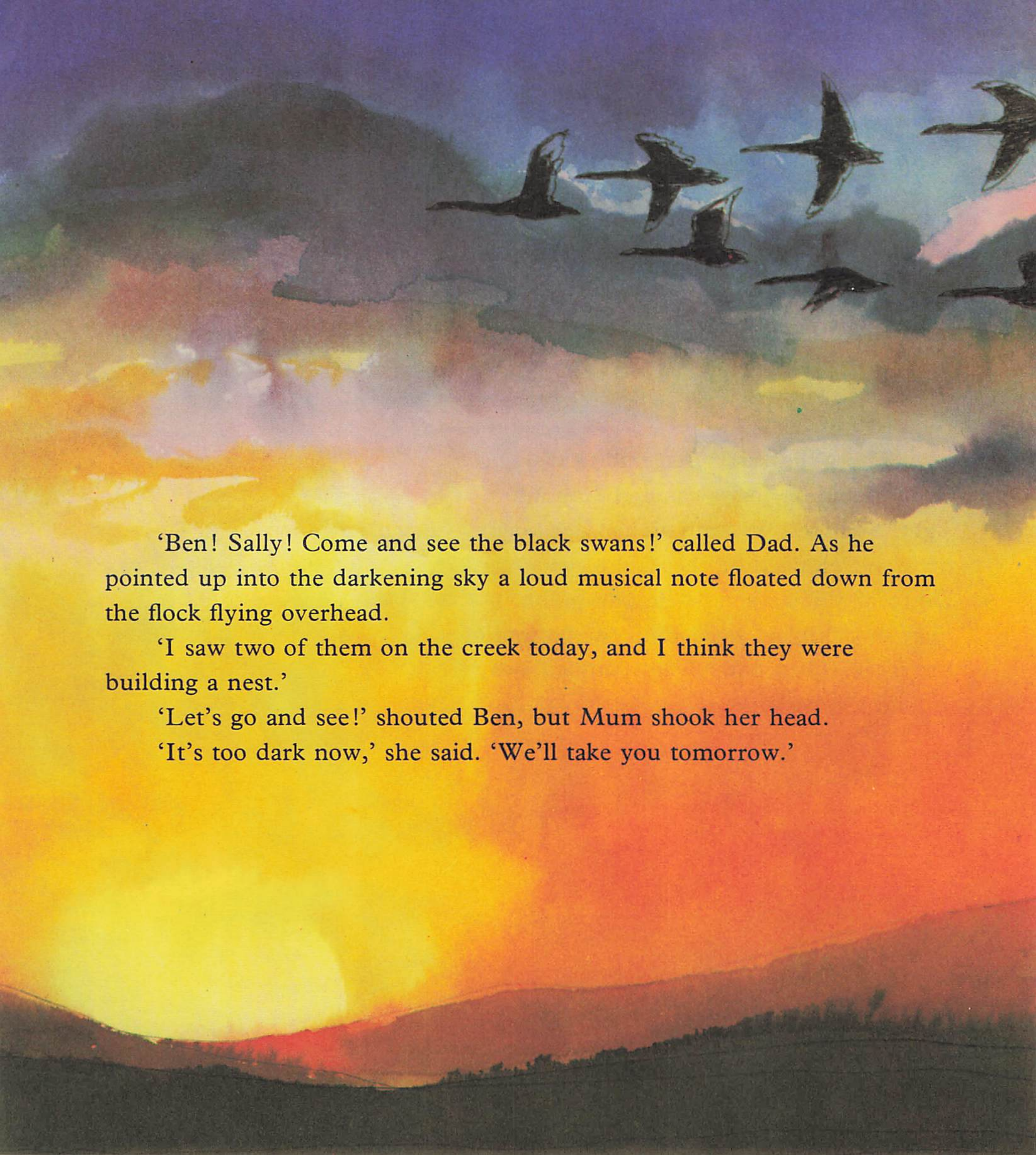




# Byamul the Black Swan

Written by Diana Petersen
Illustrated by Rich Richardson

GOLDEN PRESS

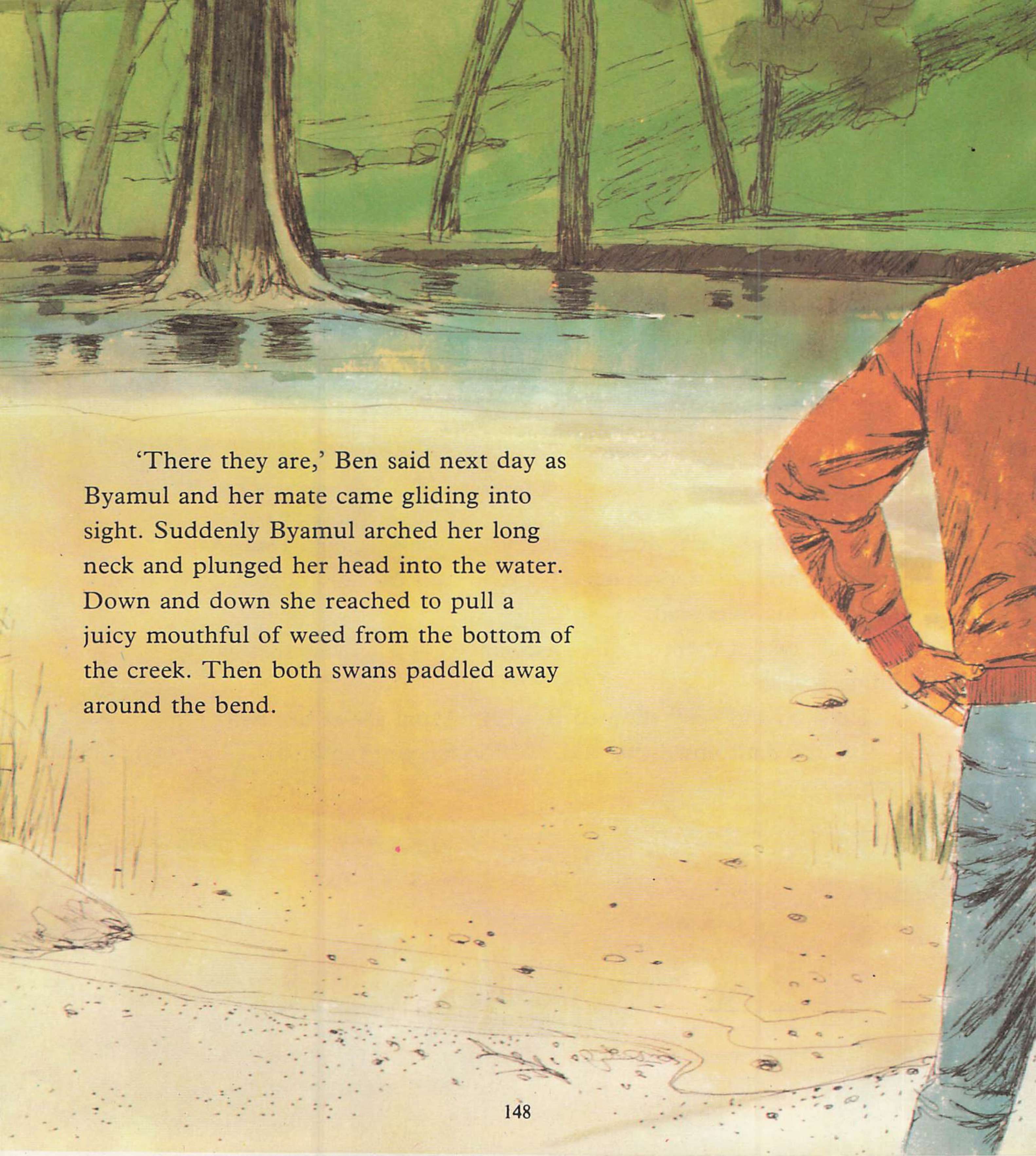


'Ben! Sally! Come and see the black swans!' called Dad. As he pointed up into the darkening sky a loud musical note floated down from the flock flying overhead.

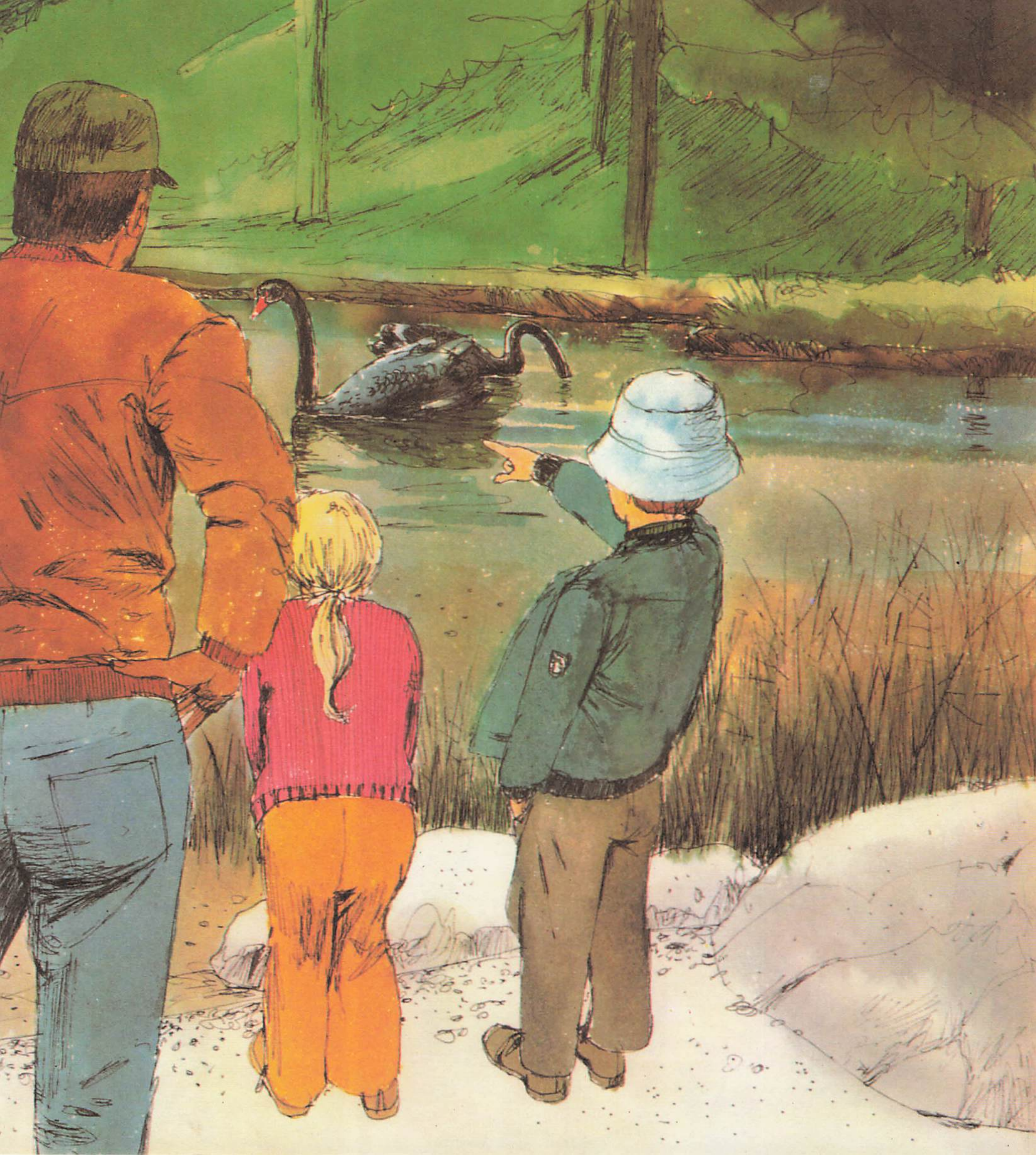
'I saw two of them on the creek today, and I think they were building a nest.'

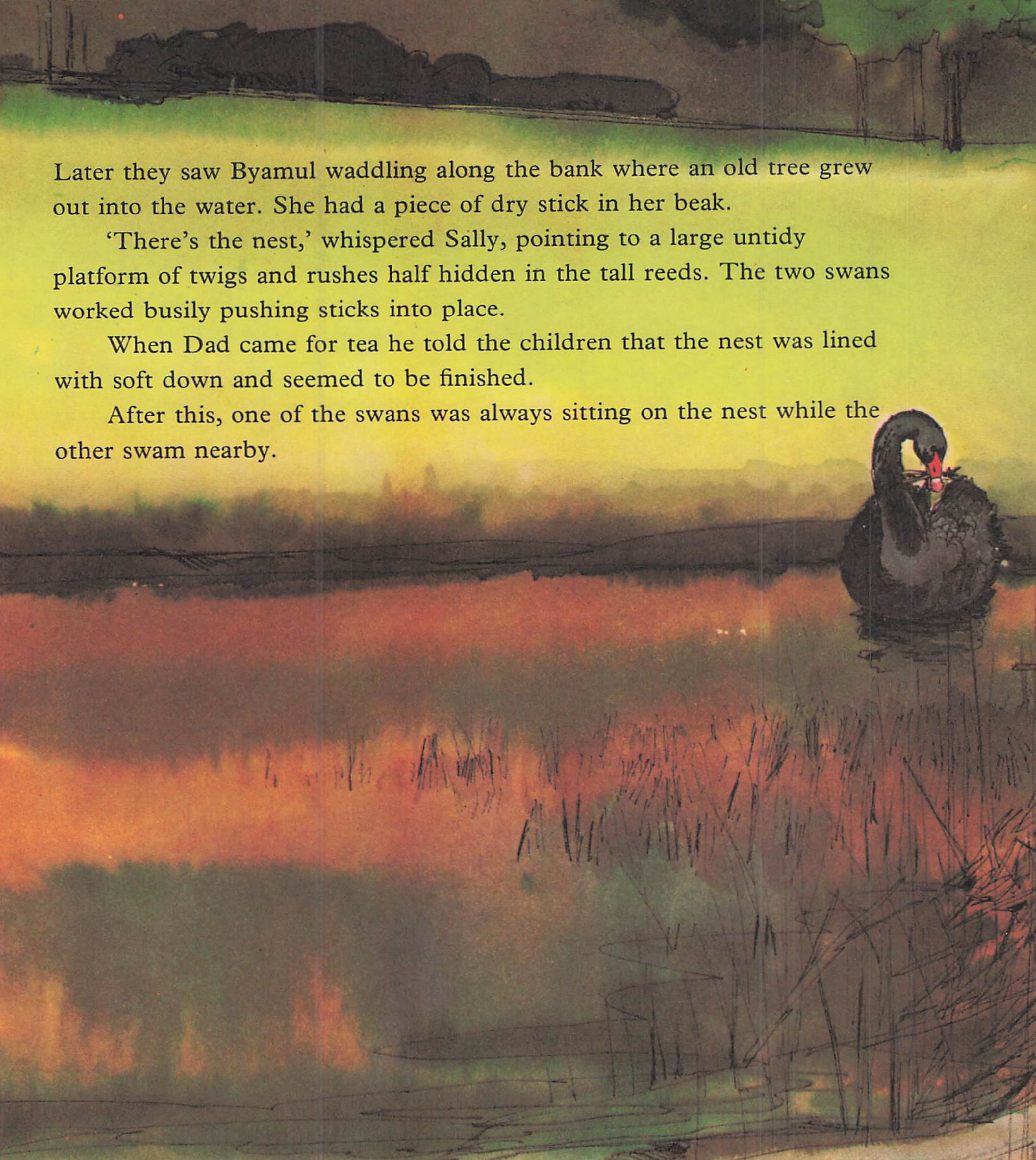
'Let's go and see!' shouted Ben, but Mum shook her head.

'It's too dark now,' she said. 'We'll take you tomorrow.'



‘There they are,’ Ben said next day as Byamul and her mate came gliding into sight. Suddenly Byamul arched her long neck and plunged her head into the water. Down and down she reached to pull a juicy mouthful of weed from the bottom of the creek. Then both swans paddled away around the bend.



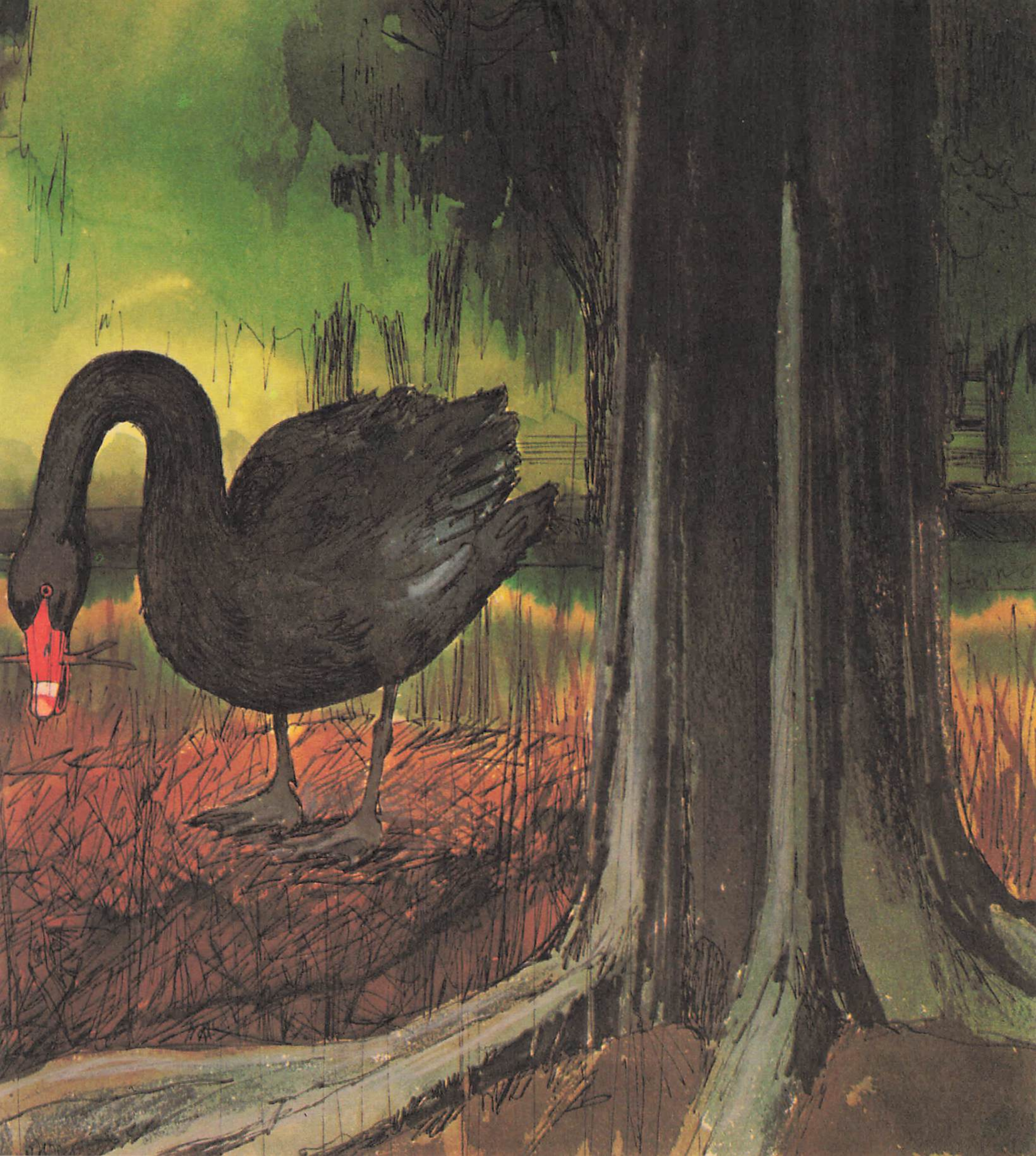


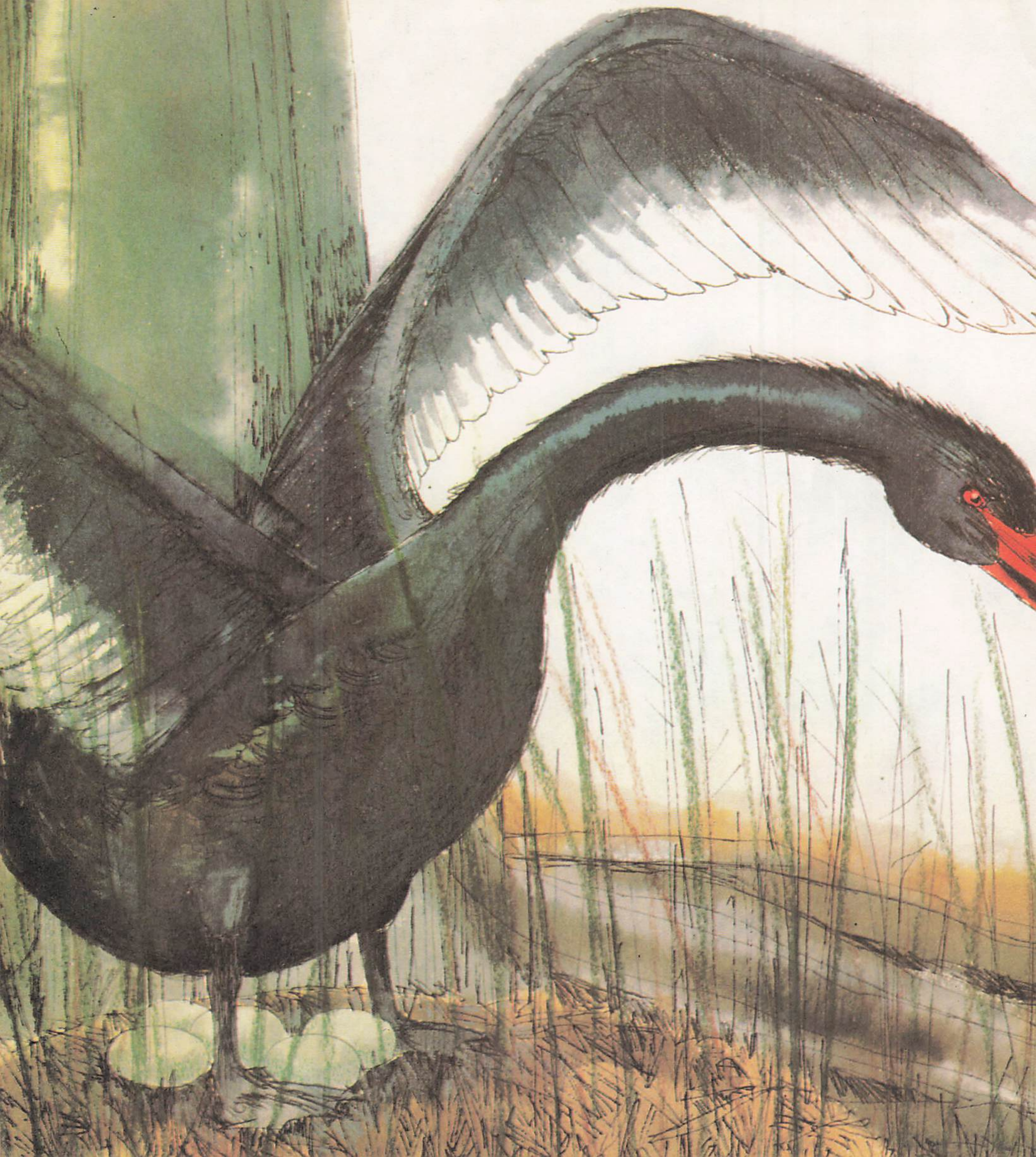
Later they saw Byamul waddling along the bank where an old tree grew out into the water. She had a piece of dry stick in her beak.

'There's the nest,' whispered Sally, pointing to a large untidy platform of twigs and rushes half hidden in the tall reeds. The two swans worked busily pushing sticks into place.

When Dad came for tea he told the children that the nest was lined with soft down and seemed to be finished.

After this, one of the swans was always sitting on the nest while the other swam nearby.



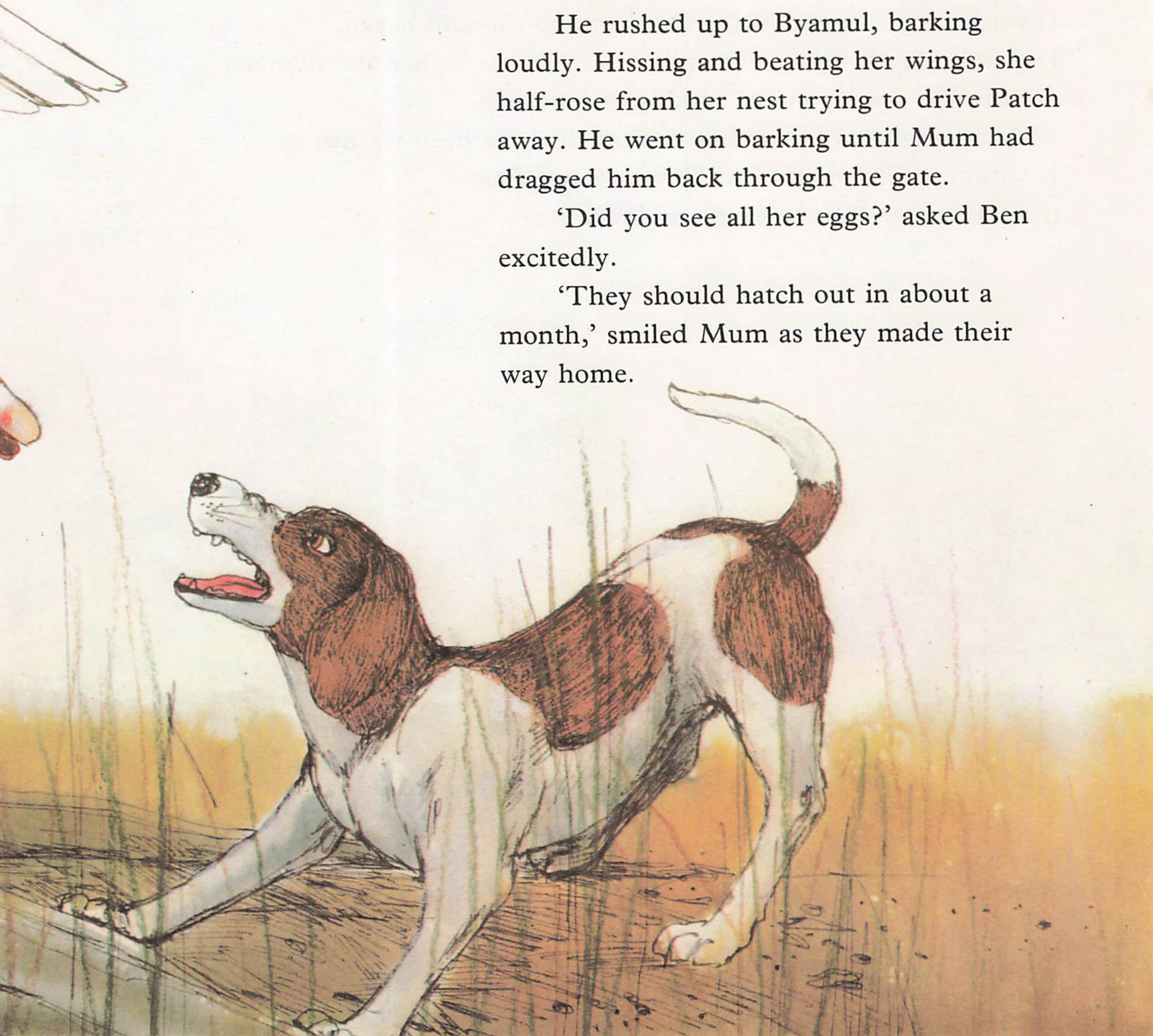


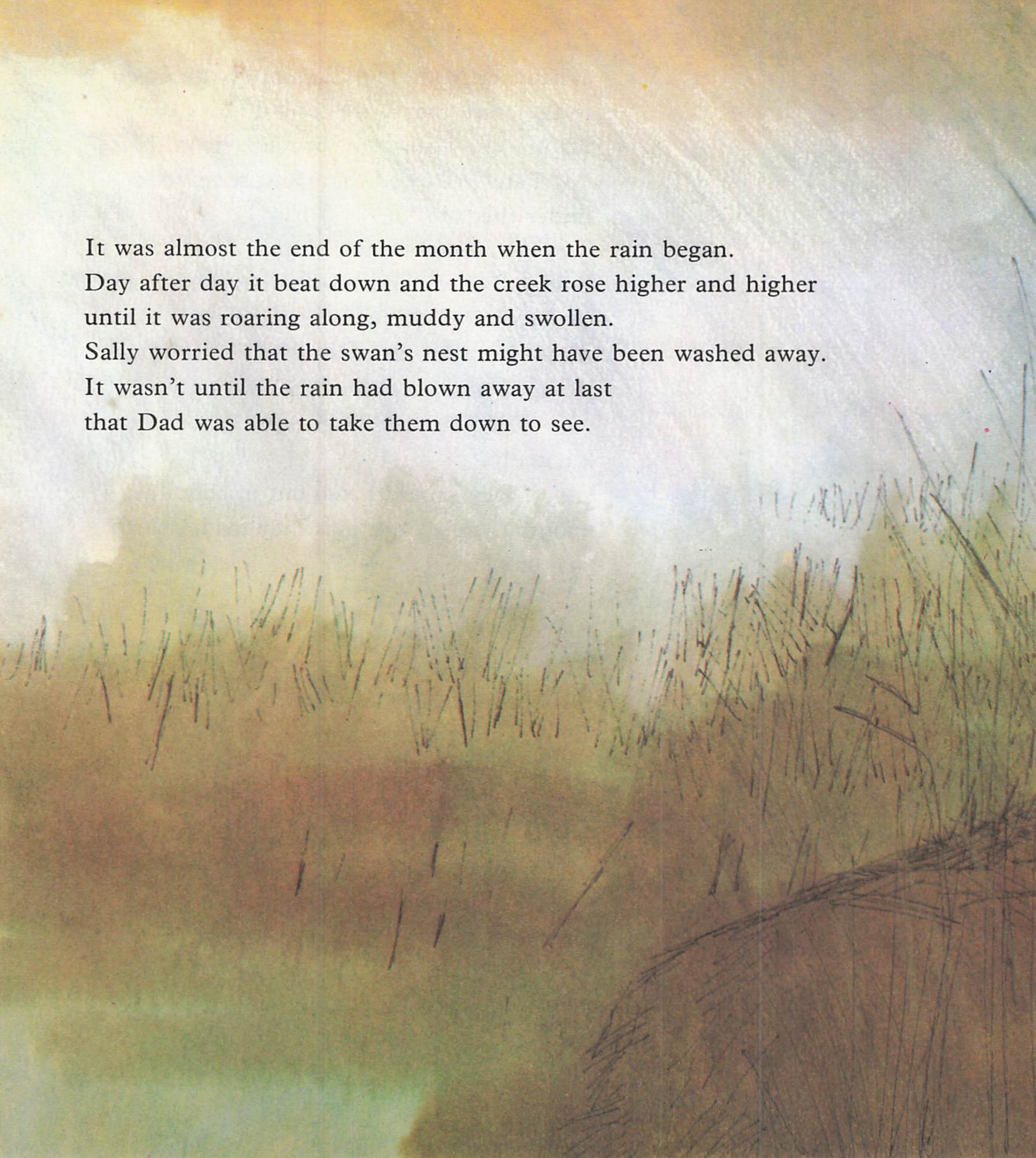
Whenever Mum took Ben and Sally down to the creek they were careful never to disturb the swans, but one afternoon their dog Patch followed them and squeezed under the gate.

He rushed up to Byamul, barking loudly. Hissing and beating her wings, she half-rose from her nest trying to drive Patch away. He went on barking until Mum had dragged him back through the gate.

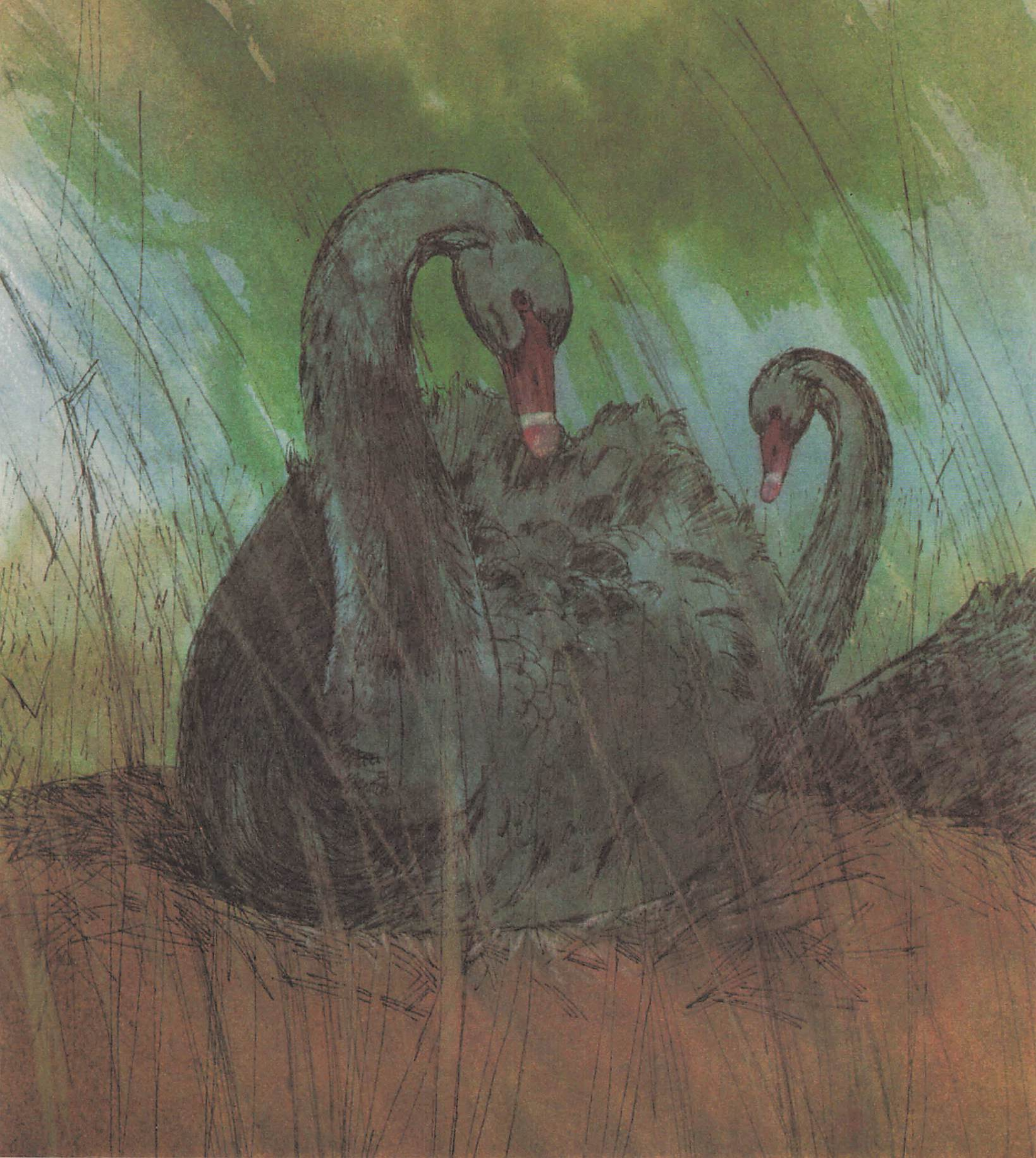
'Did you see all her eggs?' asked Ben excitedly.

'They should hatch out in about a month,' smiled Mum as they made their way home.



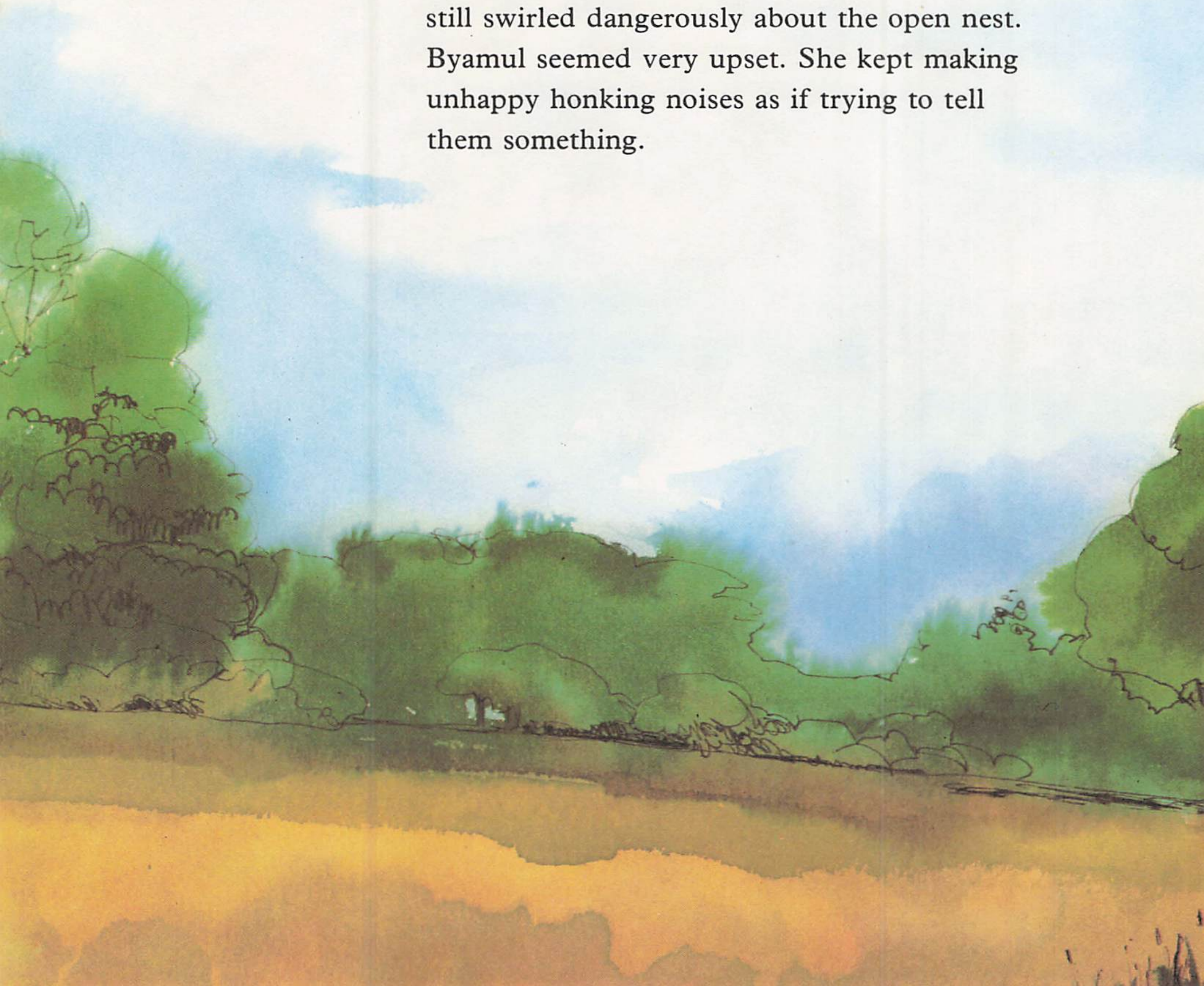


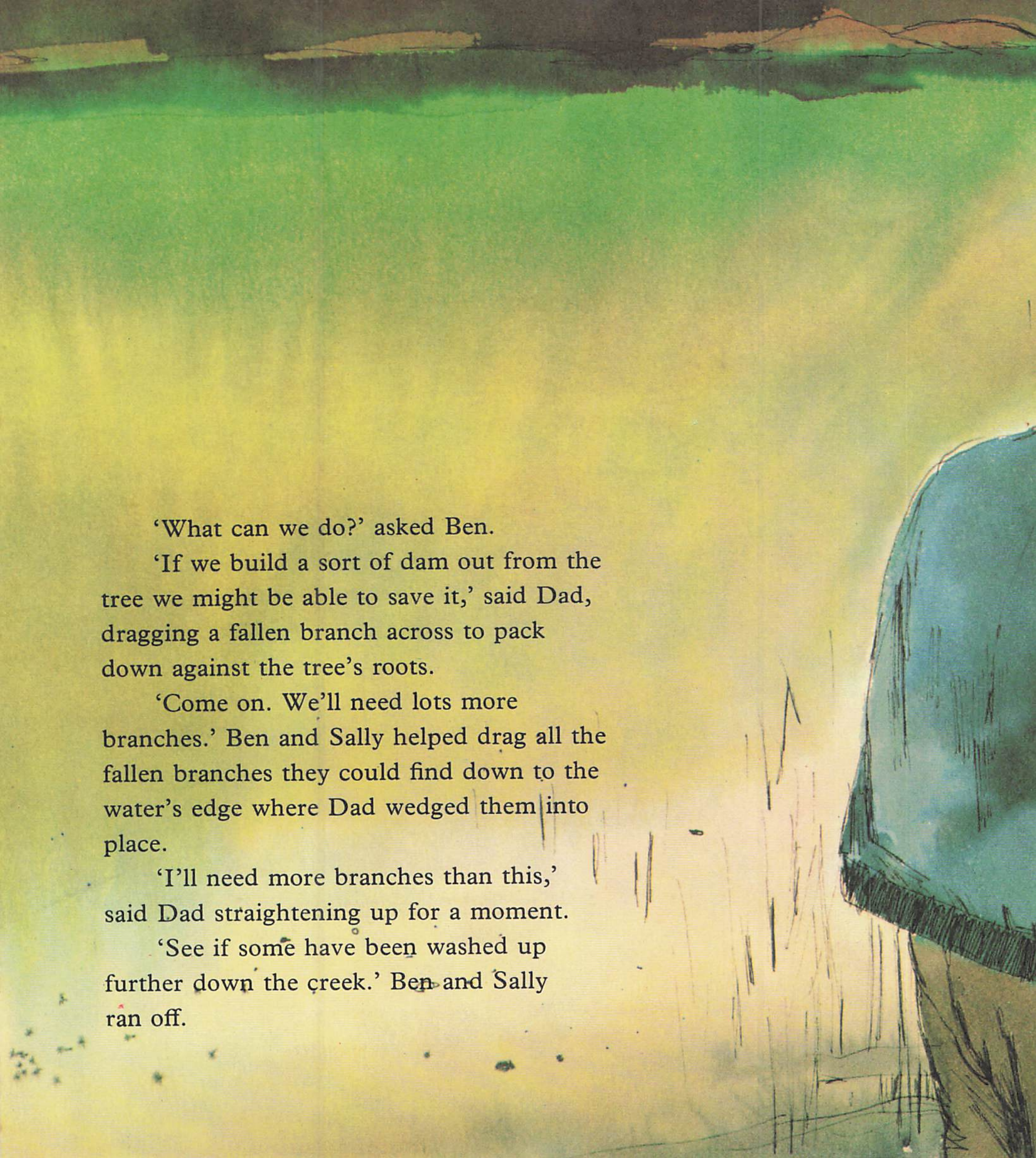
It was almost the end of the month when the rain began.
Day after day it beat down and the creek rose higher and higher
until it was roaring along, muddy and swollen.
Sally worried that the swan's nest might have been washed away.
It wasn't until the rain had blown away at last
that Dad was able to take them down to see.



'Look it's still there,' said Sally with a sigh of relief.

'But it won't be there for long if we don't do something quickly,' said Dad grimly. He could see that although the old tree's roots had protected the nest from the worst of the water's force, the muddy water still swirled dangerously about the open nest. Byamul seemed very upset. She kept making unhappy honking noises as if trying to tell them something.





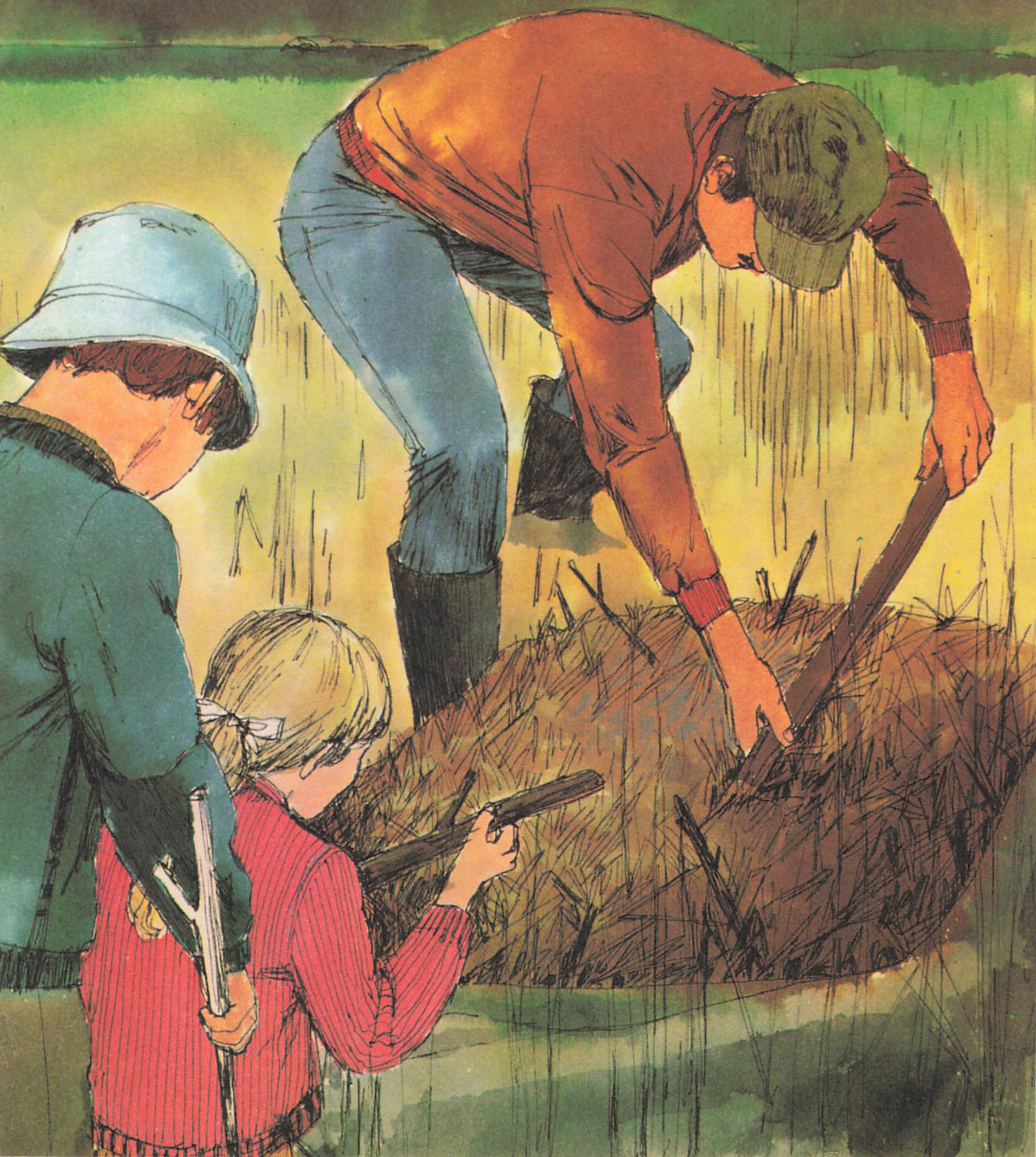
'What can we do?' asked Ben.

'If we build a sort of dam out from the tree we might be able to save it,' said Dad, dragging a fallen branch across to pack down against the tree's roots.

'Come on. We'll need lots more branches.' Ben and Sally helped drag all the fallen branches they could find down to the water's edge where Dad wedged them into place.

'I'll need more branches than this,' said Dad straightening up for a moment.

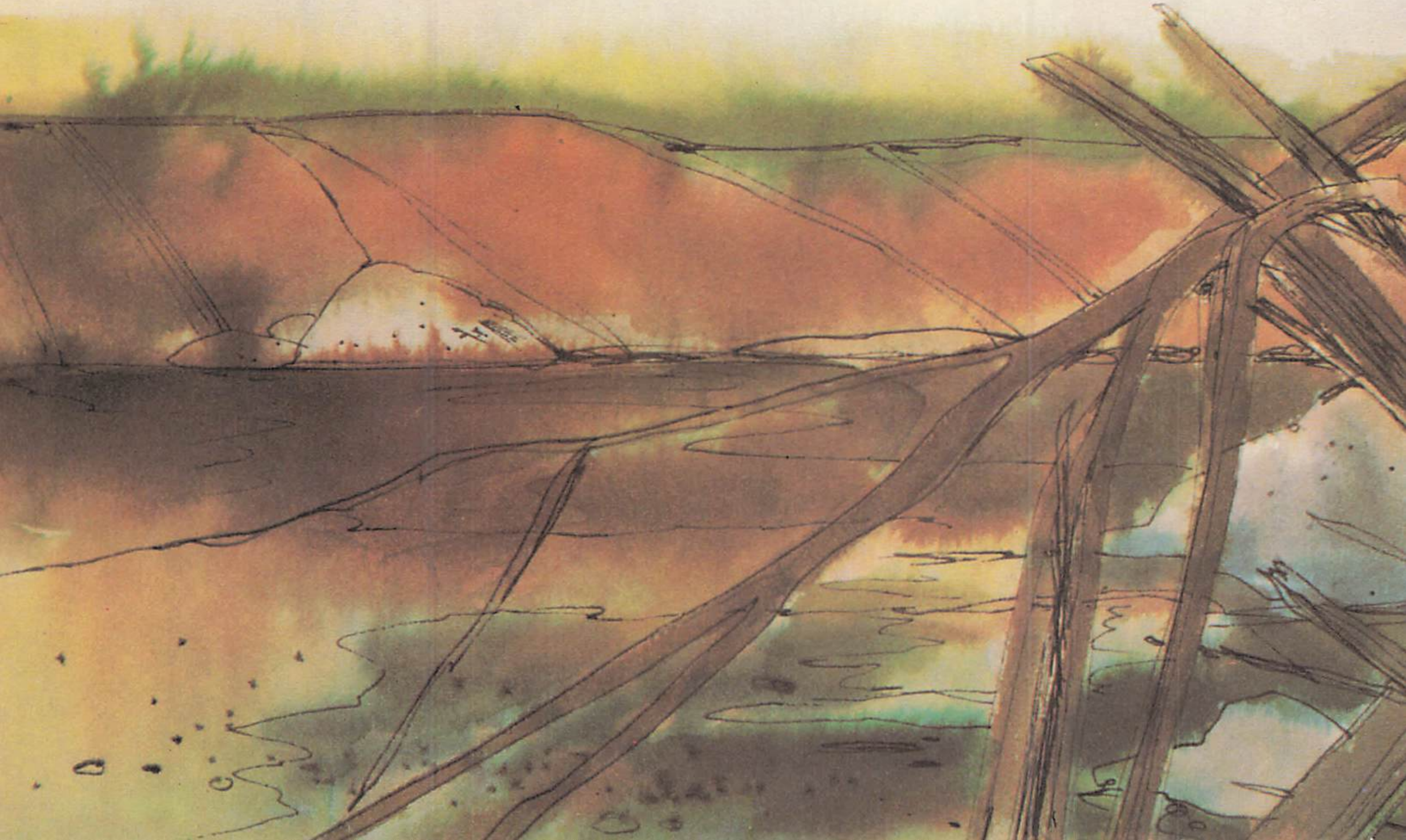
'See if some have been washed up further down the creek.' Ben and Sally ran off.

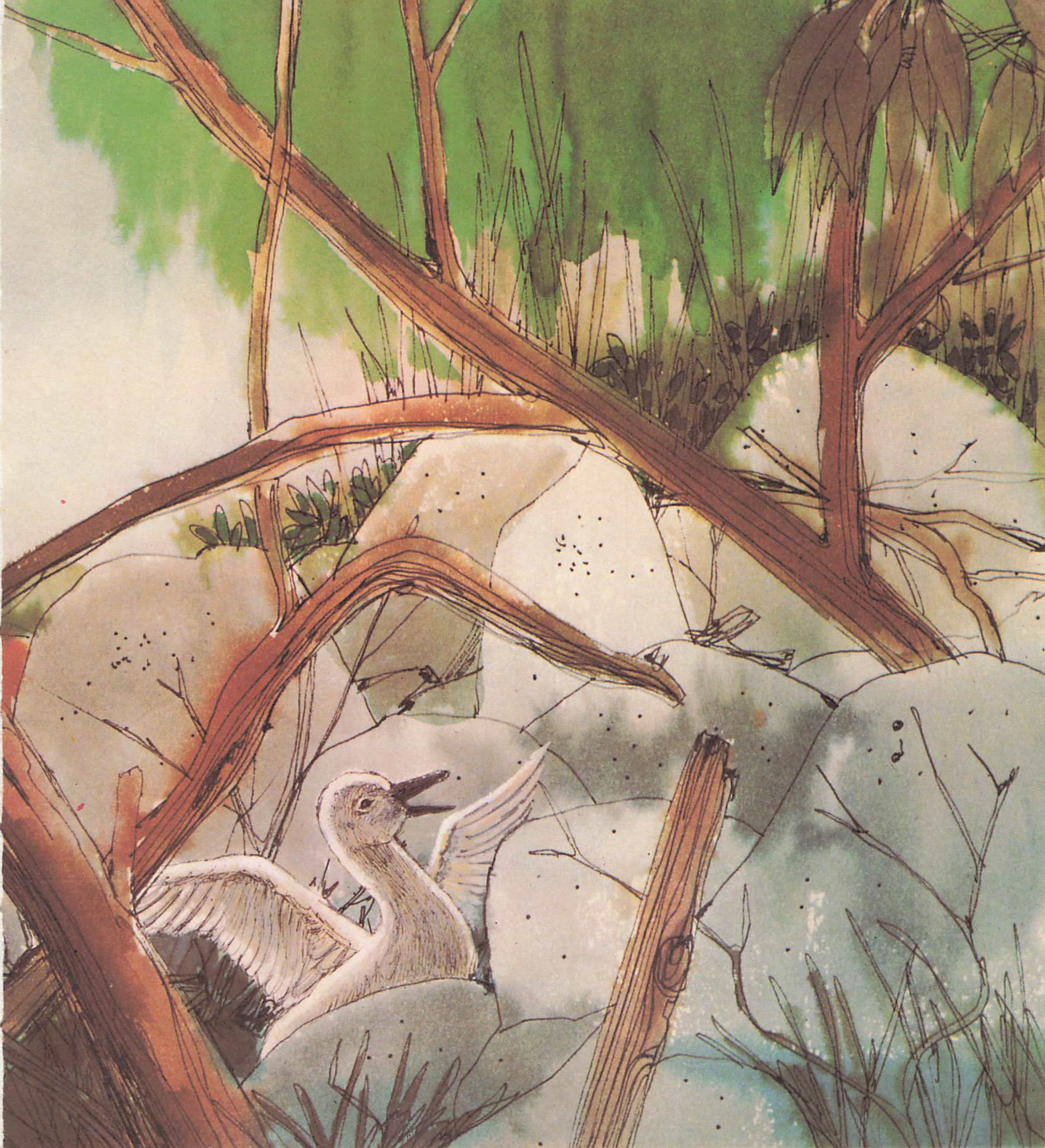


They saw one branch trapped against some rocks, but before they could reach it, it was swept into the middle of the creek and went whirling off to go crashing over the weir. Then they saw something else caught against the rocks—trapped in a tangle of sticks and leaves was a tiny cygnet!

'It's the swan's baby!' gasped Ben. 'Come on let's get Dad!'

'There isn't time!' cried Sally as some of the trapped sticks and leaves were torn away by the current.

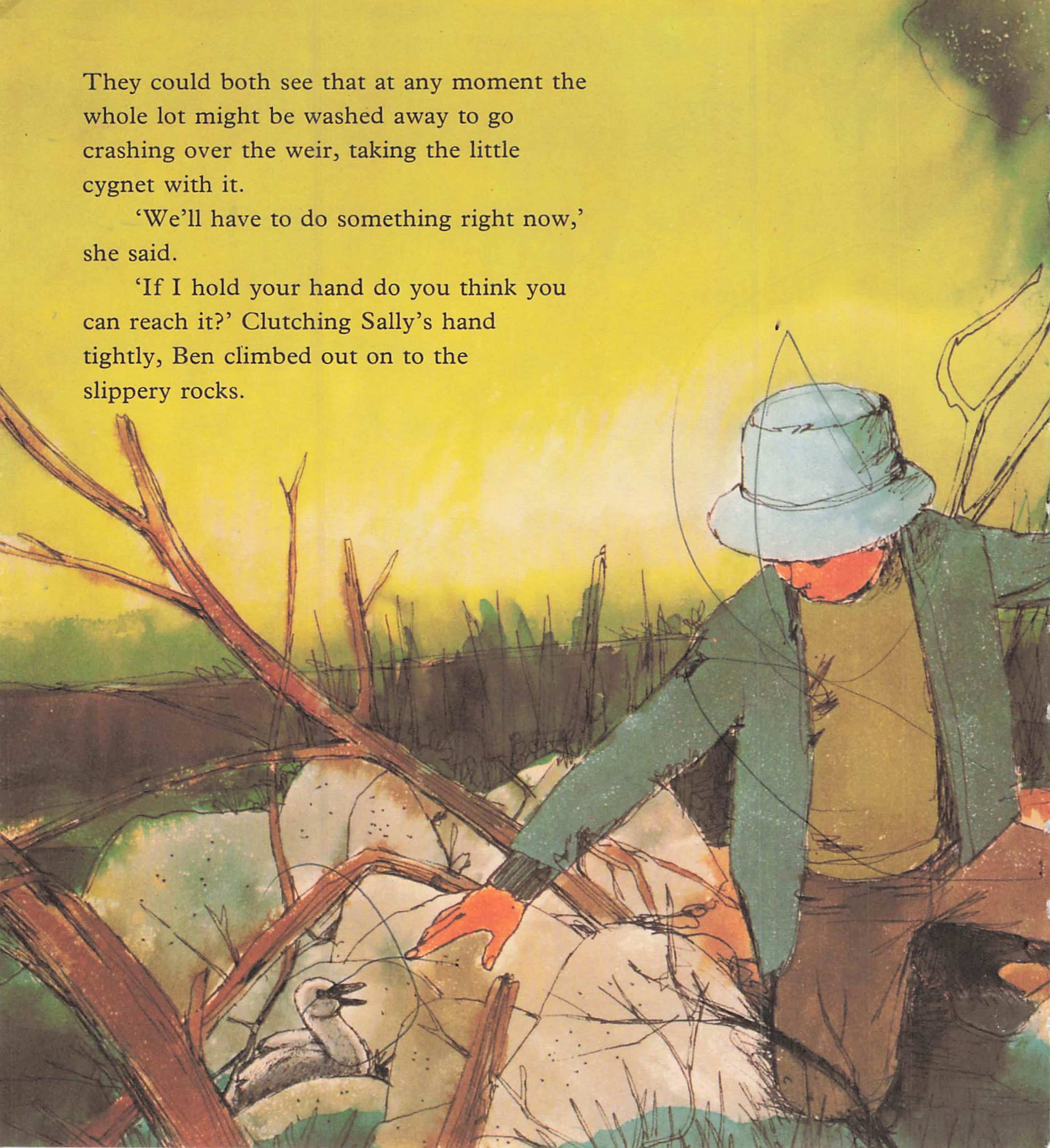


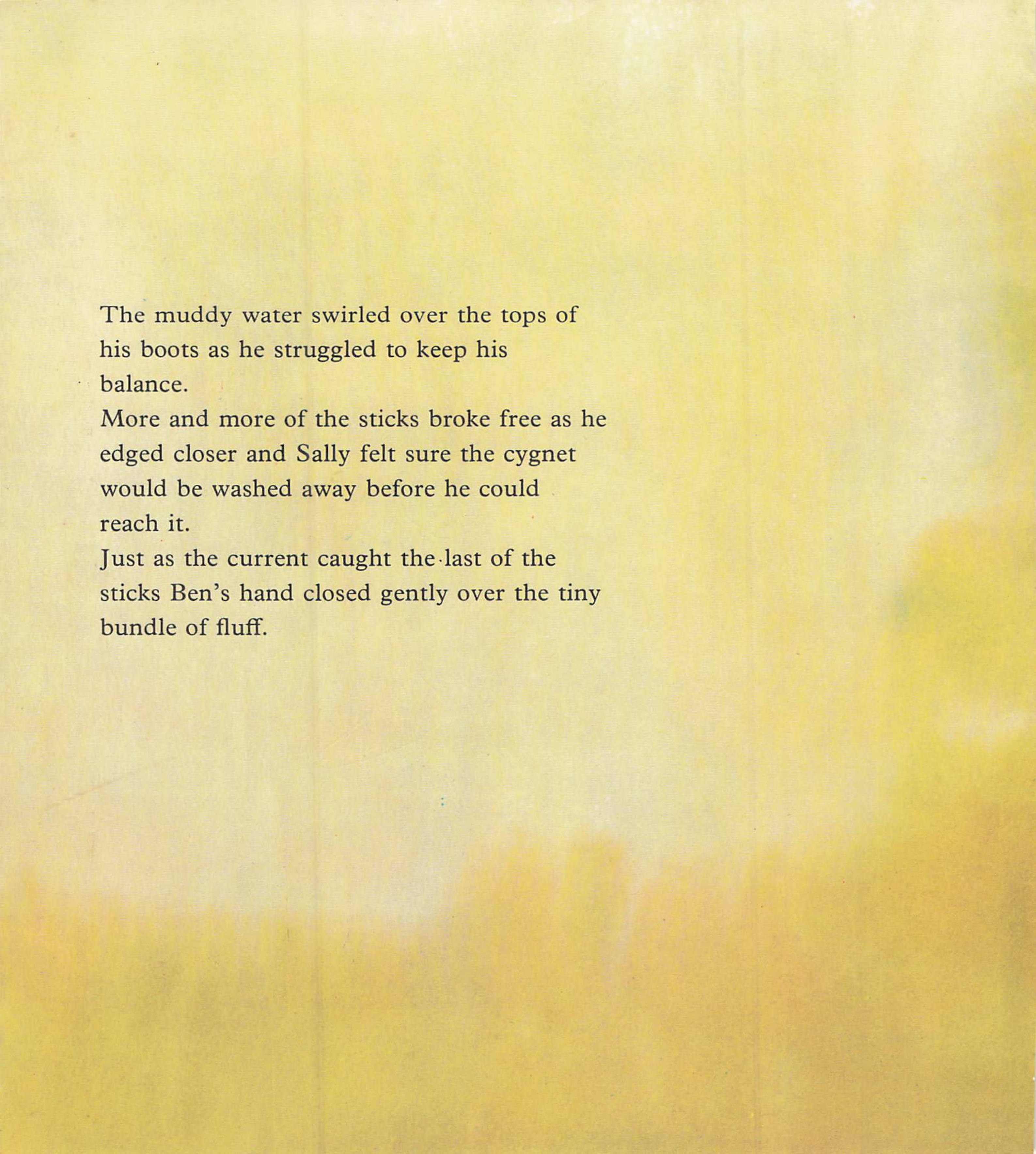


They could both see that at any moment the whole lot might be washed away to go crashing over the weir, taking the little cygnet with it.

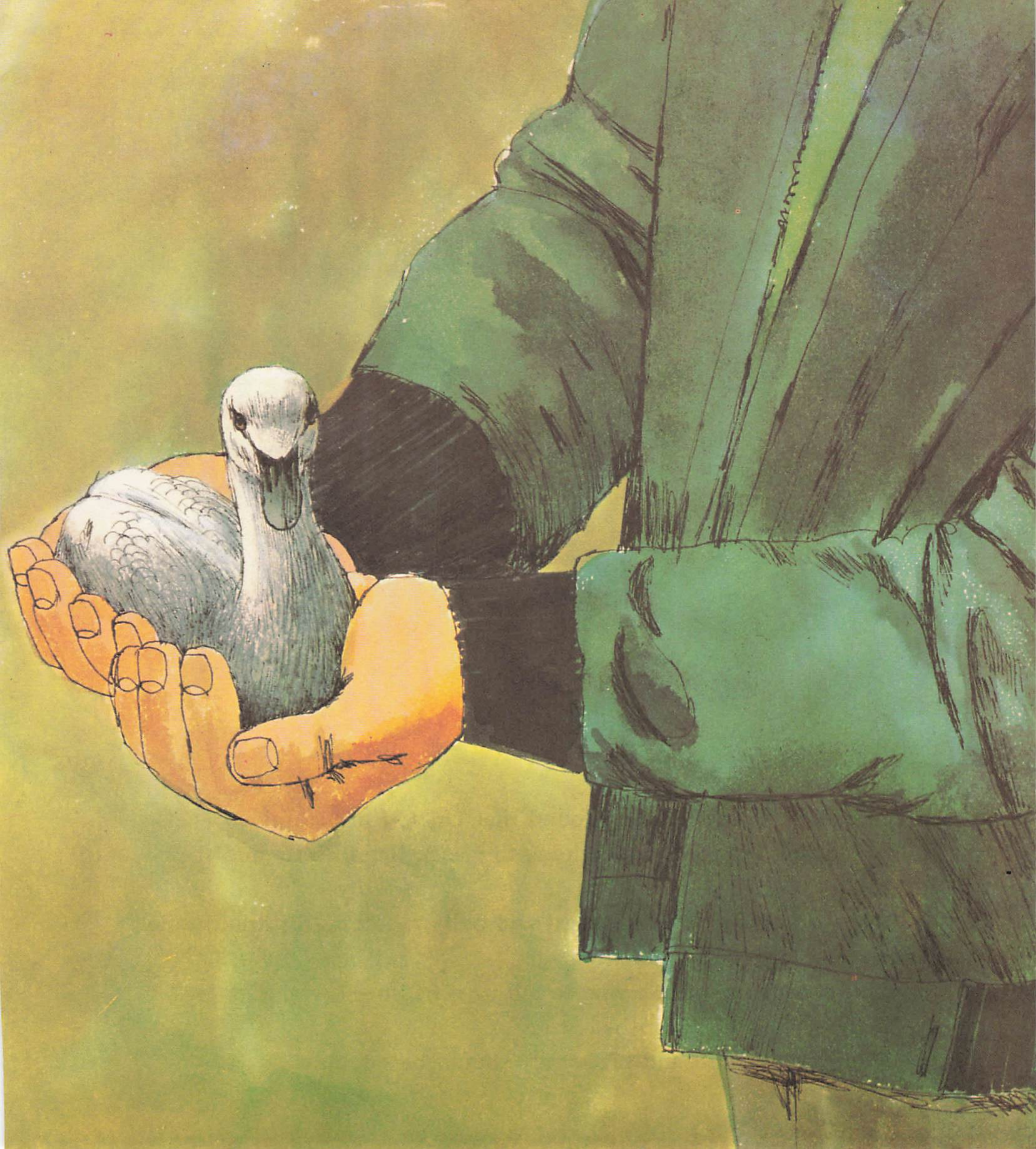
'We'll have to do something right now,' she said.

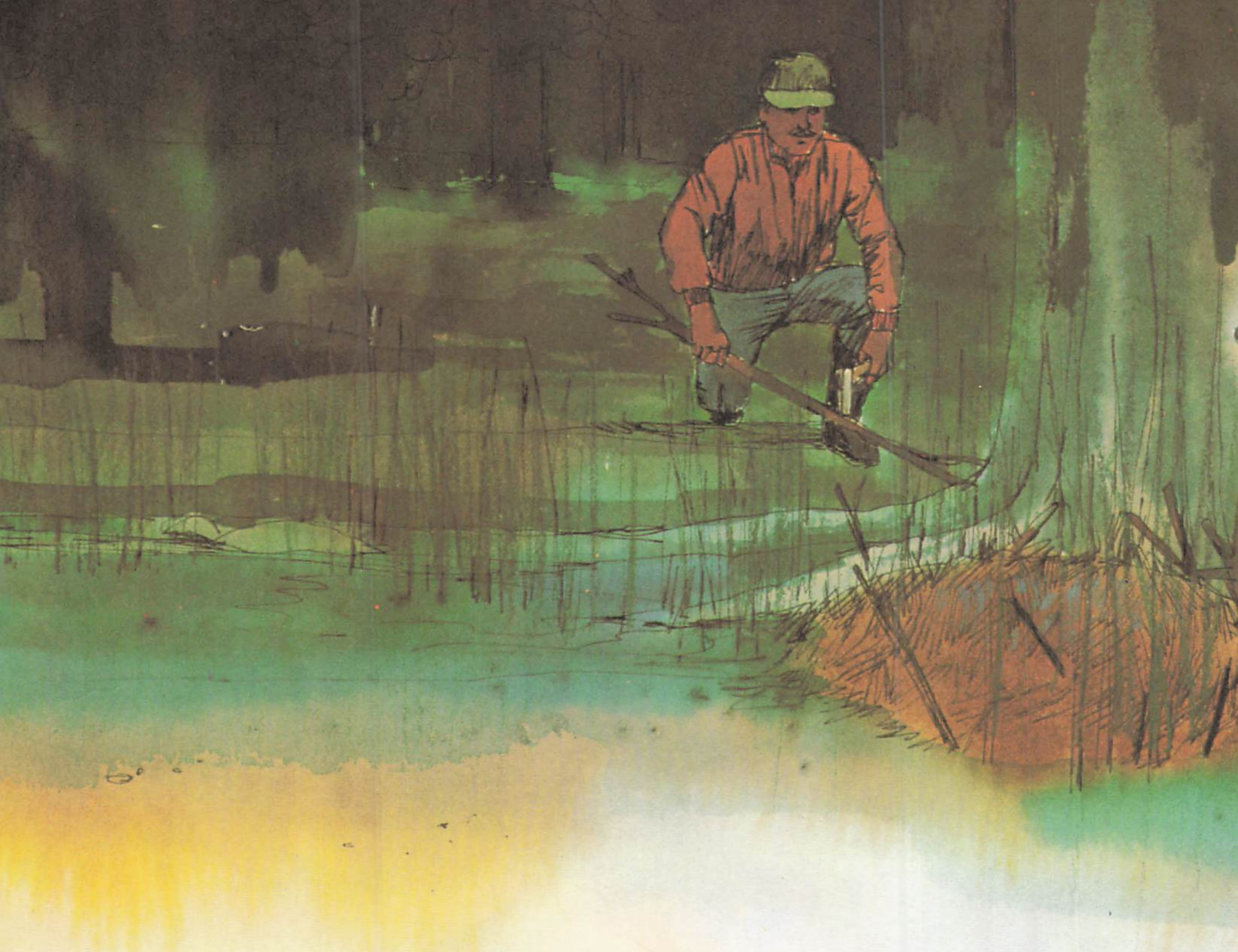
'If I hold your hand do you think you can reach it?' Clutching Sally's hand tightly, Ben climbed out on to the slippery rocks.





The muddy water swirled over the tops of his boots as he struggled to keep his balance.
More and more of the sticks broke free as he edged closer and Sally felt sure the cygnet would be washed away before he could reach it.
Just as the current caught the last of the sticks Ben's hand closed gently over the tiny bundle of fluff.





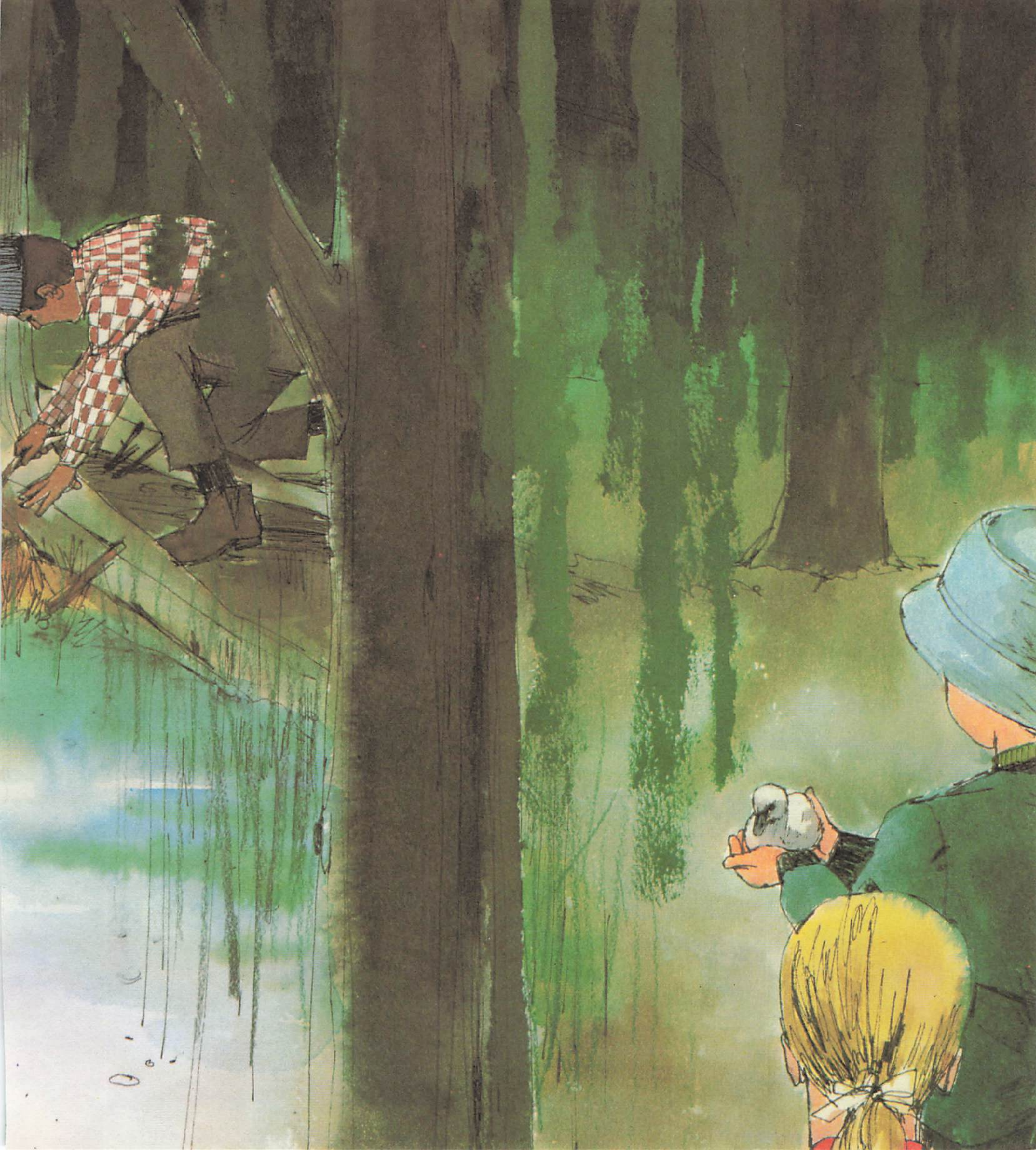
They ran back to the nest and found that Uncle Jim had joined Dad. He was cutting branches and helping to wedge them firmly into their dam.

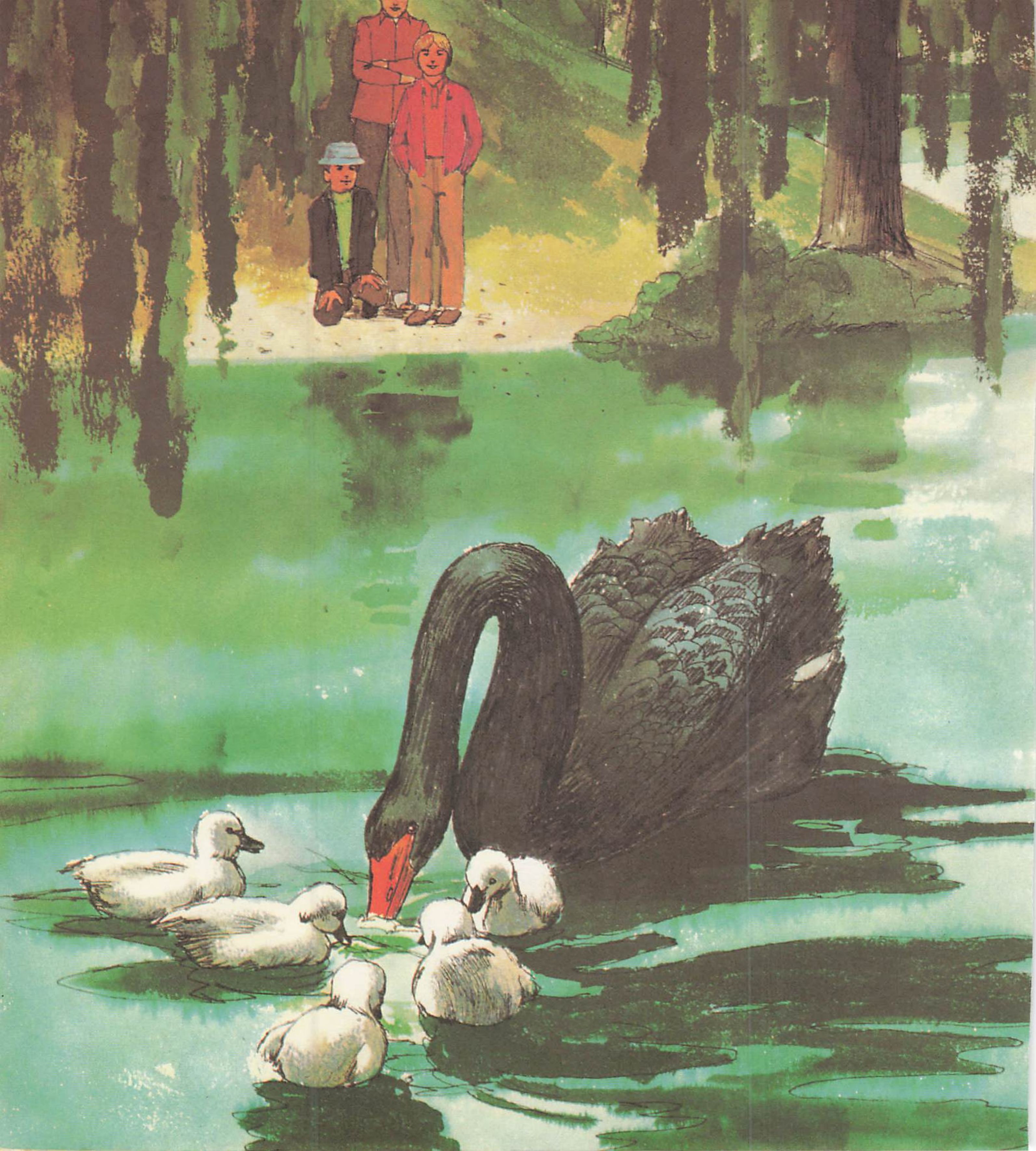
'No wonder she was so upset,' said Sally, watching Byamul nestle her rescued baby under her wing.

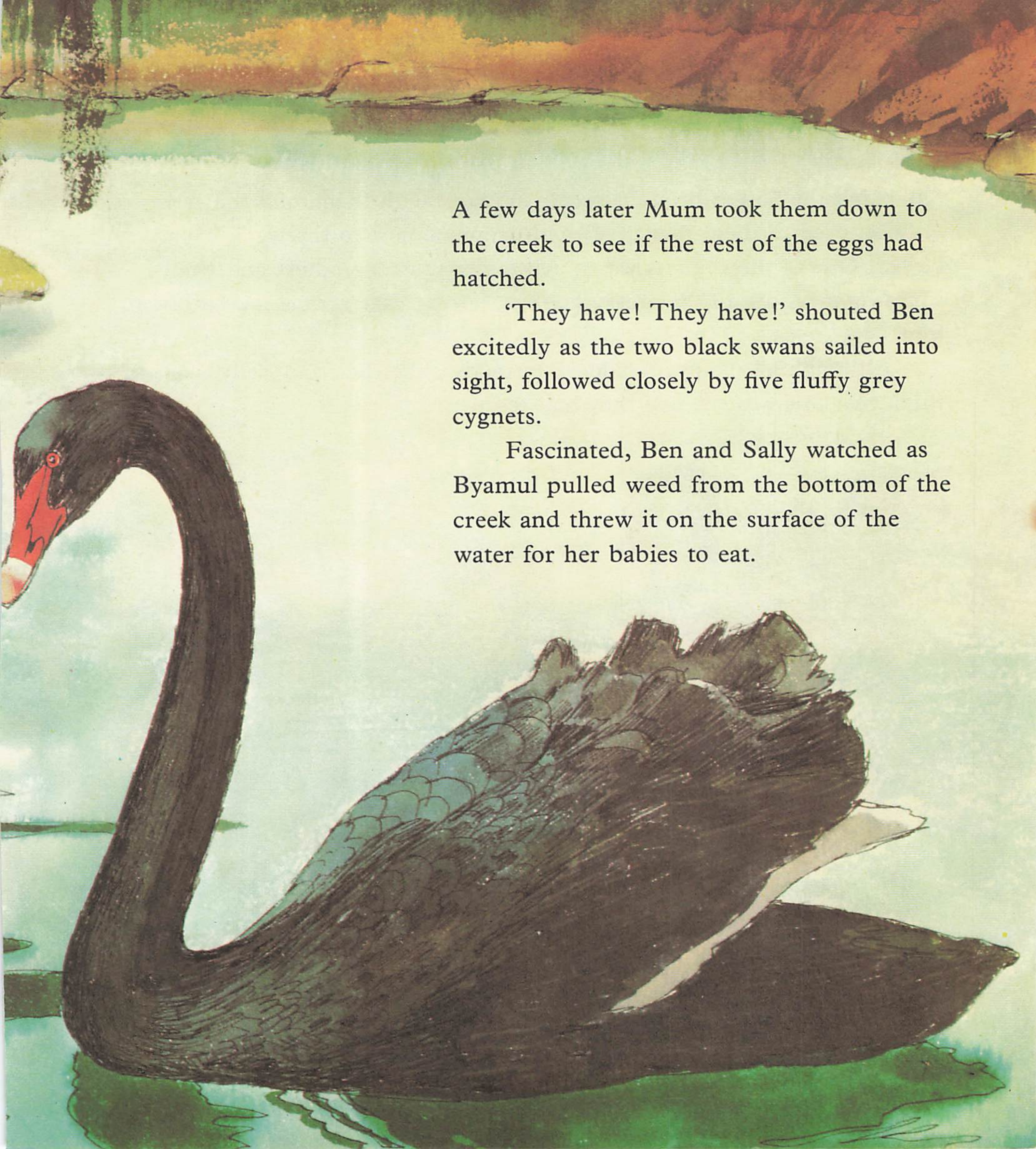
'She must have been trying to tell us it had been washed away.'

'There,' said Dad, finished at last.

'Your swan's nest and her family should be safe now.'







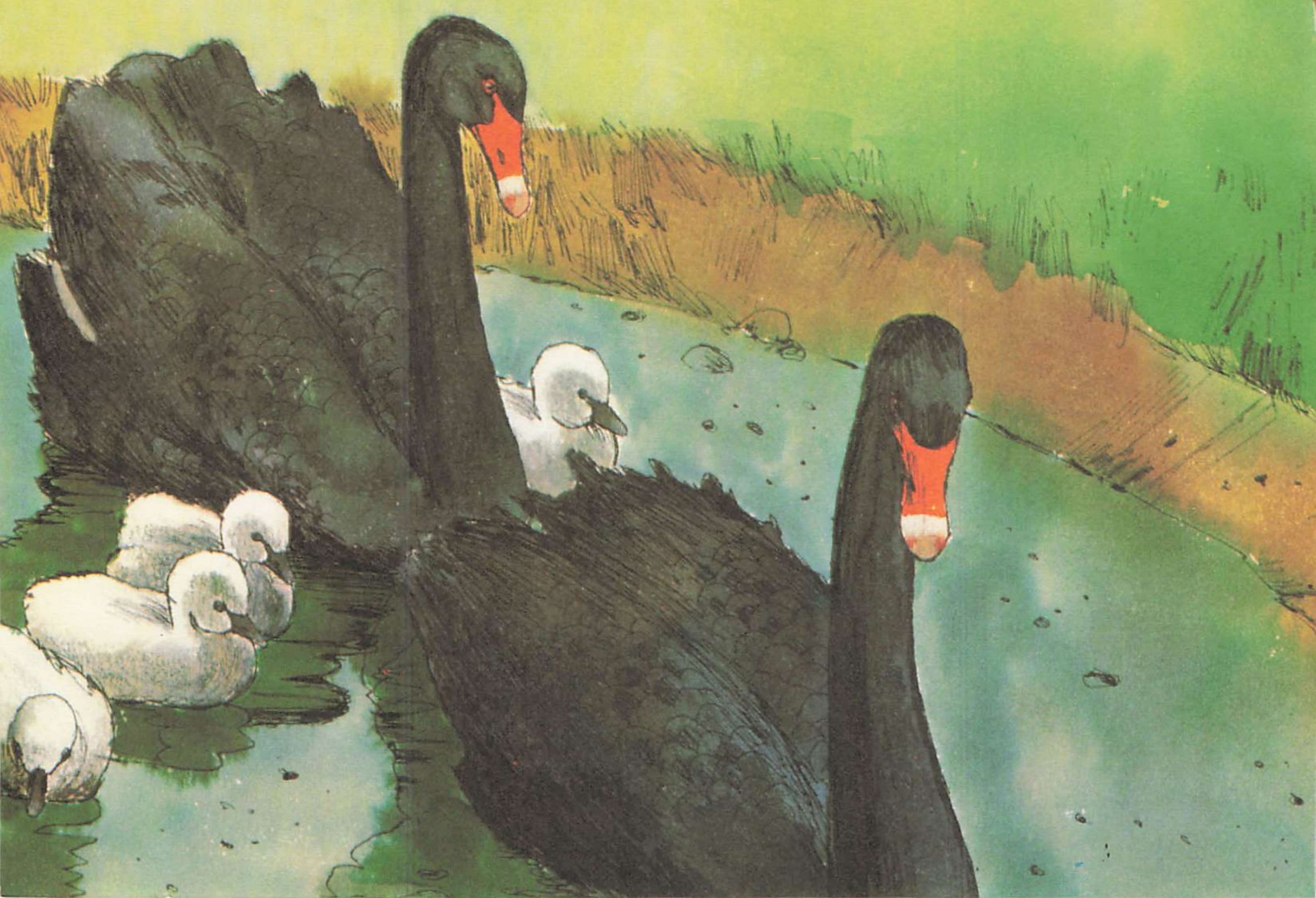
A few days later Mum took them down to the creek to see if the rest of the eggs had hatched.

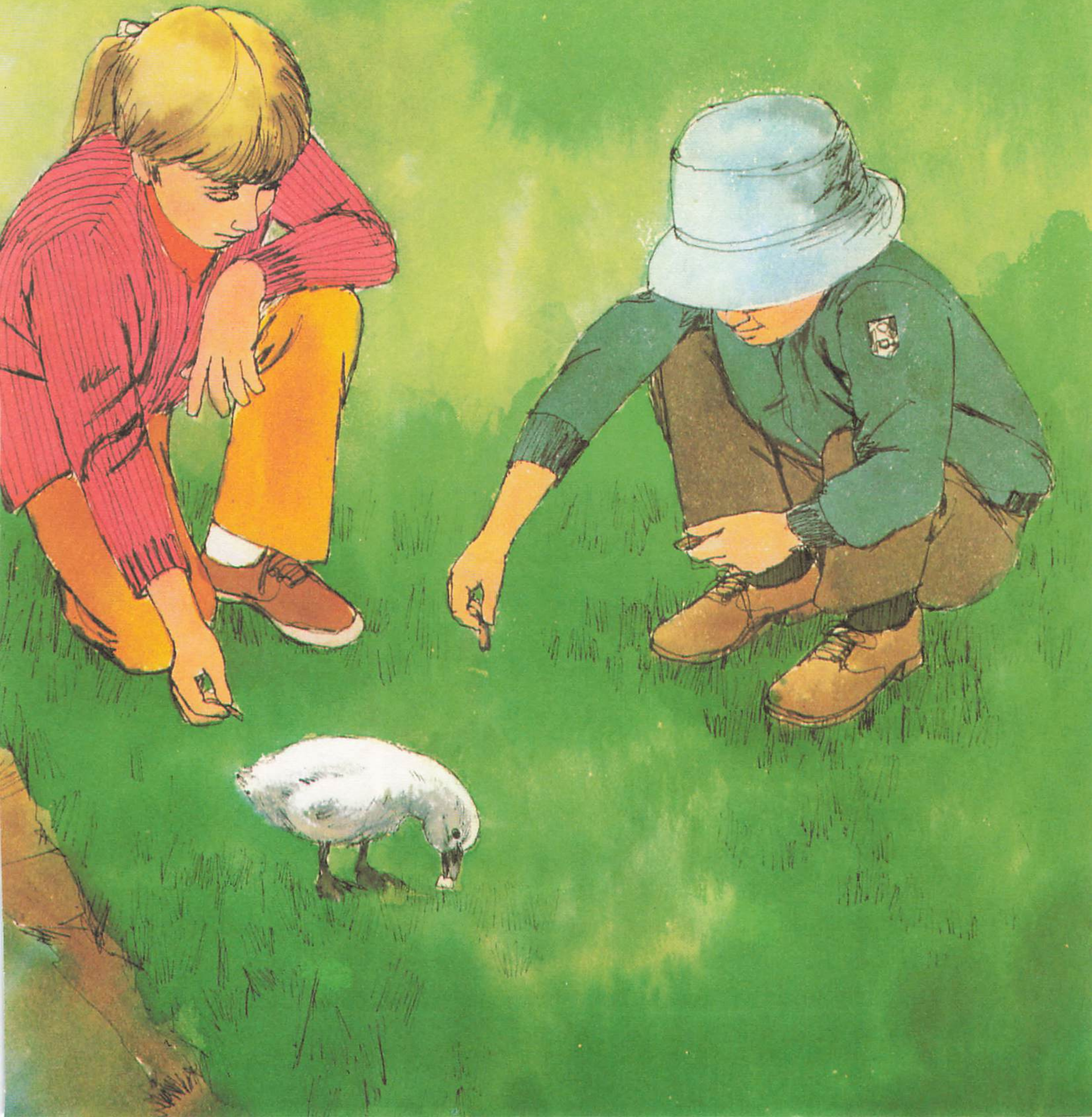
'They have! They have!' shouted Ben excitedly as the two black swans sailed into sight, followed closely by five fluffy grey cygnets.

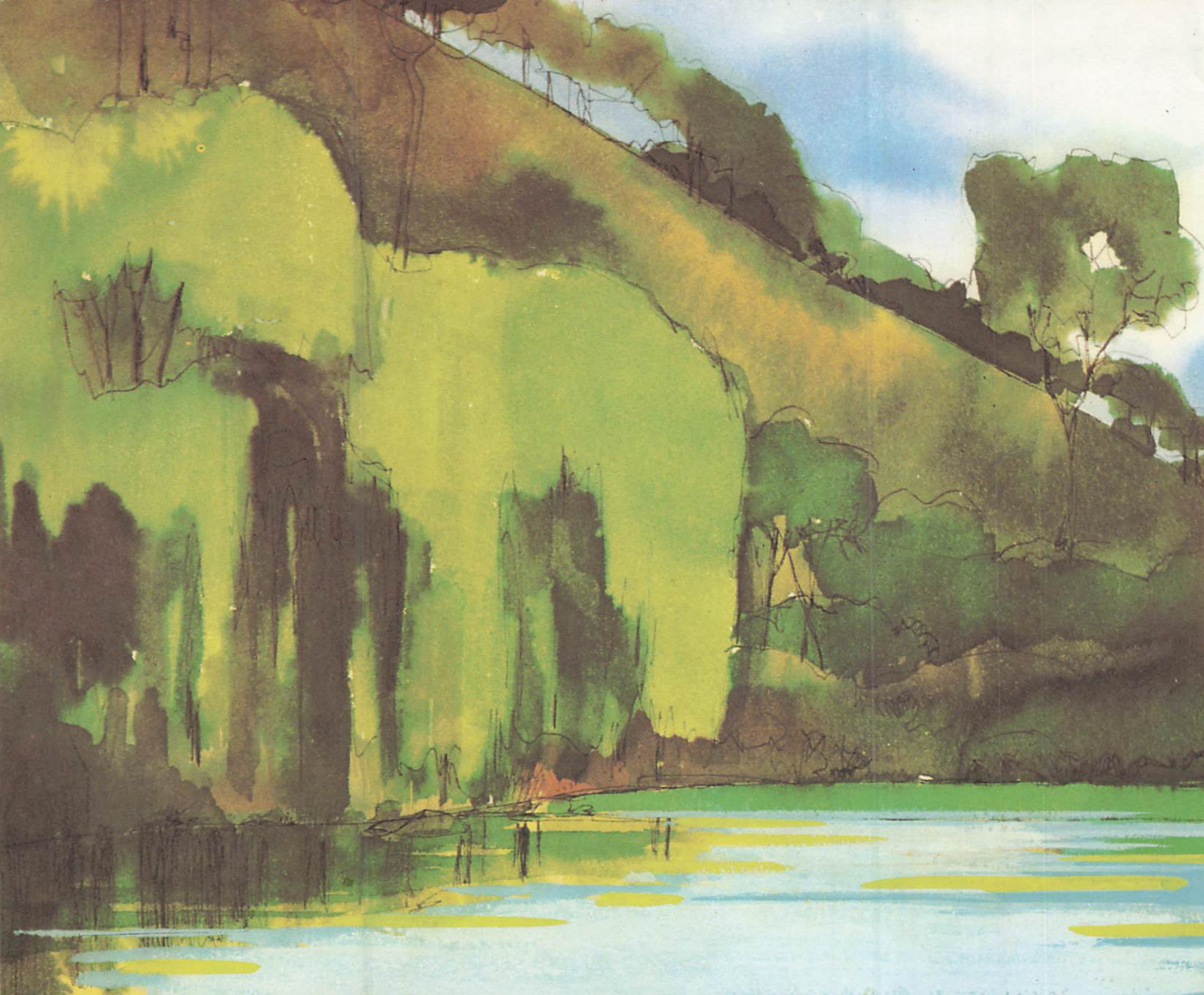
Fascinated, Ben and Sally watched as Byamul pulled weed from the bottom of the creek and threw it on the surface of the water for her babies to eat.

After that they often brought bread and cake with them, and the swans grew so used to them that they would come almost to the water's edge to be fed. One of the cygnets was much tamer than the others and would come right out on to the grassy bank to eat the cake scraps they threw to him.

Although all the cygnets looked exactly alike, Ben and Sally liked to think that this was the one they had rescued.







As the weeks passed the cygnets grew bigger and their pale grey down became darker and darker.

When at last they'd learnt to fly, the swan family left the creek, but Sally and Ben would often hear the wild bugling notes of the black swans as they flew overhead from one feeding ground to another.

They felt sure that Byamul and her mate would come back next winter, to build another nest on the creek.